SHERIDAN

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT

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ENGLISH MEN OF LETTERS

EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY

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NOTE.

THE most important and, on the whole, trustworthy life of Sheridan is that of Moore, published in 1825, nine years after Sheridan's death, and founded upon the fullest information, with the help of all that Sheridan had left behind in the way of papers, and all that the family could furnish—along with Moore's own personal recollections. It is not a very characteristic piece of work, and greatly dissatisfied the friends and lovers of Sheridan; but its authorities are unimpeachable. A previous Memoir by Dr. Watkins, the work of a political opponent and detractor, was without either this kind of authorisation or any grace of personal knowledge, and has fallen into oblivion. Very different is the brief sketch by the well-known Professor Smyth, a most valuable and interesting contribution to the history of Sheridan. It concerns, indeed, only the later part of his life, but it is the most life-like and, under many aspects, the most touching contemporary portrait that has been made of him. With the professed intention of making up for the absence of character in Moore's *Life*, a small volume of SHERIDANIANA was published the year after, which is full of amusing anecdotes, but little, if any, additional information. Other essays on the subject have been many. Scarcely an edition of Sheridan's plays has been published (and they are numberless) without a biographical notice, good or bad. The most noted of these is perhaps the *Biographical and Critical Sketch*

of Leigh Hunt, which does not, however, pretend to any new light, and is entirely unsympathetic. Much more recently a book of personal *Recollections by an Octogenarian* promised to afford new information; but, except for the froth of certain dubious and not very savoury stories of the Prince Regent period, failed to do so.

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RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN.

CHAPTER I.

HIS YOUTH.

Richard Brinsley Butler Sheridan was born in Dublin, in the month of September, 1751, of a family which had already acquired some little distinction of a kind quite harmonious with the after fame of him who made its name so familiar to the world. The Sheridans were of that Anglo-Irish type which has given so much instruction and amusement to the world, and which has indeed in its wit and eccentricity so associated itself with the fame of its adopted country, that we might almost say it is from this peculiar variety of the race that we have all taken our idea of the national character. It will be a strange thing to discover, after so many years' identification of the idiosyncrasy as Irish, that in reality it is a hybrid, and not native to the soil. The race of brilliant, witty, improvident, and reckless Irishmen whom we have all been taught to admire, excuse, love, and condemn—the Goldsmiths, the Sheridans, and many more that will occur to the reader—all belong to this mingled blood. Many are more Irish, according to our present understanding of the word, than their compatriots of a purer race; but perhaps it is some-

thing of English energy which has brought them to the front, to the surface, with an indomitable life which misfortune and the most reckless defiance of all the laws of living never seem able to quench. Among these names, and not among the O'Connors and O'Briens, do we find all that is most characteristic, to modern ideas, in Irish manners and modes of thought. Nothing more distinct from the Anglo-Saxon type could be; and yet it is separated from England in most cases only by an occasional mixture of Celtic blood—often by the simple fact of establishment for a few generations on another soil. How it is that the bog and the mountain, the softer climate, the salt breath of the Atlantic, should have wrought this change, is a mystery of ethnology which we are quite incompetent to solve; or whether it is mere external contact with an influence which the native gives forth without being himself strongly affected by it, we cannot tell. But the fact remains that the most characteristic Irishmen—those through whom we recognize the race—are, as a matter of fact, so far as race is concerned, not Irishmen at all. The same fact tells in America, where a new type of character seems to have been ingrafted upon the old by the changed conditions of so vast a continent and circumstances so peculiar. Even this, however, is not so remarkable, in an altogether new society, as the absorption, by what was in reality an alien and a conquering race, of all that is most remarkable in the national character which they dominated and subdued—unless, indeed, we take refuge in the supposition, which does not seem untenable, that this character, which we have been so hasty in identifying with it, is not really Irish at all; and that we have not yet fathomed the natural spirit, overlaid by such a *couche* of superficial foreign brilliancy, of that more mystic race, full of

tragic elements, of visionary faith and purity, of wild revenge and subtle cunning, which is in reality native to the old island of the saints. Certainly the race of Columba seems to have little in common with the race of Sheridan.

The two immediate predecessors of the great dramatist are both highly characteristic figures, and thoroughly authentic, which is as much perhaps as any man of letters need care for. The first of these, Dr. Thomas Sheridan, Brinsley Sheridan's grandfather, was a clergyman and schoolmaster in Dublin in the early part of the eighteenth century—by all reports an excellent scholar and able instructor, but extravagant and hot-headed after his kind. He was the intimate friend and associate of Swift in his later years, and lent a little brightness to the great Dean's society when he returned disappointed to his Irish preferment. Lord Orrery describes this genial but reckless parson in terms which are entirely harmonious with the after development of the family character:

"He had that kind of good nature which absence of mind, indolence of body, and carelessness of fortune produce; and although not over-strict in his own conduct, yet he took care of the morality of his scholars, whom he sent to the university remarkably well-grounded in all kinds of learning, and not ill-instructed in the social duties of life. He was slovenly, indigent, and cheerful. He knew books better than men, and he knew the value of money least of all."

The chief point in Dr. Sheridan's career is of a tragi-comic character which still further increases the appropriateness of his appearance at the head of his descendants. By Swift's influence he was appointed to a living in Cork, in addition to which he was made one of the Lord-lieutenant's chaplains, and thus put in the way of promotion generally. But on one unlucky Sunday the following incident occurred. It must be remembered that these

were the early days of the Hanoverian succession, and that Ireland had been the scene of the last struggle for the Stuarts. He was preaching in Cork, in the principal church of the town, on the 1st of August, which was kept as the King's birthday:

"Dr. Sheridan, after a very solemn preparation, and when he had drawn to himself the mute attention of his congregation, slowly and emphatically delivered his text, *Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.* The congregation, being divided in political opinions, gave to the text a decided political construction, and on the reverend preacher again reading the text with more marked emphasis became excited, and listened to the sermon with considerable restlessness and anxiety."

Another account describes this sermon as having been preached before the Lord-lieutenant himself, an honour for which the preacher was not prepared, and which confused him so much that he snatched up the first sermon that came to hand, innocent of all political intention, as well as of the date which gave such piquancy to his text. But, whatever the cause, the effect was disastrous. He "shot his fortune dead by chance-medley" with this single text. He lost his chaplaincy, and is even said to have been forbidden the viceregal court, and all the ways of promotion were closed to him for ever. But his spirit was not broken by his evil luck. "Still he remained a punster, a quibbler, a fiddler, and a wit. Not a day passed without a rebus, an anagram, or a madrigal. His pen and his fiddle were constantly in motion." He had "such a ready wit and flow of humour that it was impossible for any, even the most splenetic man, not to be cheerful in his company." "In the invitations sent to the Dean, Sheridan was always included; nor was Swift to be seen in perfect good humour unless when he made part of the

company." Nothing could be more congenial to the name of Sheridan than the description of this light-hearted and easy-minded clerical humorist, whose wit no doubt flashed like lightning about all the follies of the mimic court which had cast him out, and whose jovial, hand-to-mouth existence had all that accidentalness and mixture of extravagance and penury which is the natural atmosphere of such reckless souls. It is even said that Swift made use of his abilities and appropriated his wit: the reader must judge for himself whether the Dean had any need of thieving in that particular.

Dr. Sheridan's son, Thomas Sheridan, was a very different man. He was very young when he was left to make his way in the world for himself; he had been designed, it would appear, to be a schoolmaster, like his father; but the stage has always had an attraction for those whose associations are connected with that more serious stage, the pulpit, and Thomas Sheridan became an actor. He is the author of a life of Swift, said to be "pompous and dull"—qualities which seem to have mingled oddly in his own character with the light-hearted recklessness of his race. His success on the stage was not so great as was his popularity as a teacher of elocution, an art for which he seems to have conceived an almost fanatical enthusiasm. Considering oratory, not without reason, as the master of all arts, he spent a great part of his life in eager efforts to form a school for its study, after a method of his own. This was not a successful project, nor, according to the little gleam of light thrown upon his system by Dr. Parr, does it seem to have been a very elevated one. "One of Richard's sisters now and then visited Harrow," he says, "and well do I remember that in the house where I lodged she triumphantly repeated Dryden's ode upon St. Cecilia's

Day, according to the instruction given her by her father. Take a sample:

'*None* but the brave,
None but the *brave*,
None *but* the brave deserve the fair.'"

Thomas Sheridan, however, was not without appreciation as an actor, and, like every ambitious player of the time, had his hopes of rivalling Garrick, and was fondly considered by his friends to be worthy comparison with that king of actors. He married a lady who held no inconsiderable place in the light literature of the time, which was little, as yet, invaded by feminine adventure — the author of a novel called *Sidney Biddulph* and of various plays. And there is a certain reflection of the same kind of friendship which existed between Swift and the elder Sheridan in Boswell's description, in his *Life of Johnson*, of the loss his great friend had sustained through a quarrel with Thomas Sheridan, "of one of his most agreeable resources for amusement in his lonely evenings." It would appear that at this time (1763) Sheridan and his wife were settled in London:

"Sheridan's well-informed, animated, and bustling mind never suffered conversation to stagnate," Boswell adds, "and Mrs. Sheridan was a most agreeable companion to an intellectual man. She was sensible, ingenious, unassuming, yet communicative. I recollect with satisfaction many pleasing hours which I passed with her under the hospitable roof of her husband, who was to me a very kind friend. Her novel entitled *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Biddulph* contains an excellent moral, while it inculcates a future state of retribution; and what it teaches is impressed upon the mind by a series of as deep distresses as can afflict humanity in the amiable and pious heroine. . . Johnson paid her this high compliment upon it: 'I know not, madam, that you have a right upon high principles to make your readers suffer so much.'"

The cause of Johnson's quarrel with Sheridan is said to have been some slighting words reported to the latter, which Johnson had let fall when he heard that Sheridan had received a pension of £200 a year from Government. "What! have they given *him* a pension? Then it is time for me to give up mine" — a not unnatural cause of offence, and all the more so that Sheridan flattered himself he had, by his interest with certain members of the ministry, who had been his pupils, helped to procure his pension for Johnson himself.

These were the palmy days of the Sheridan family. Their children, of whom Richard was the third, had been born in Dublin, where the two little boys, Richard and his elder brother, Charles, began their education under the charge of a schoolmaster named Whyte, to whom they were committed with a despairing letter from their mother, who evidently had found the task of their education too much for her. Perhaps Mrs. Sheridan, in an age of epigrams, was not above the pleasure, so seductive to all who possess the gift, of writing a clever letter. She tells the schoolmaster that the little pupils she is sending him will be his tutors in the excellent quality of patience. "I have hitherto been their only instructor," she says, "and they have sufficiently exercised mine, for two such impenetrable dunces I never met with." This is the first certificate with which the future wit and dramatist appeared before the world. When the parents went to London, in 1762, the boys naturally accompanied them. And this being a time of prosperity, when Thomas Sheridan had Cabinet Ministers for his pupils, and interest enough to help the great man of letters of the age to a pension, it is not to be wondered if that hope which never springs eternal in any human breast so warmly as in that of a man who lives by his

wits, and never knows what the morrow may bring forth, should have so encouraged the vivacious Irishman as to induce him to send his boys to Harrow, proud to give them the best of education, and opportunity of making friends for themselves. His pension, his pupils, his acting, his wife's literary gains, all conjoined to give a promise of prosperity. When his friends discussed him behind his back it is true they were not very favourable to him. "There is to be seen in Sheridan something to reprehend, and everything to laugh at," says Johnson, in his "big bow-wow style;" "but, sir, he is not a bad man. No, sir: were mankind to be divided into good and bad, he would stand considerably within the ranks of the good." The same authority said of him that though he could "exhibit no character," yet he excelled in "plain declamation;" and he was evidently received in very good society, and was hospitable and entertained his friends, as it was his nature to do. Evidently, too, he had no small opinion of himself. It is from Johnson's own mouth that the following anecdote at once of his liberality and presumption is derived. It does not show his critic, perhaps, in a more favourable light:

"Sheridan is a wonderful admirer of the tragedy of *Douglas*, and presented its author with a gold medal. Some years ago, at a coffee-house in Oxford, I called to him, 'Mr. Sheridan, Mr. Sheridan! how came you to give a gold medal to Home for writing that horrid play?' This you see was wanton and insolent; but I meant to be wanton and insolent. A medal has no value but as a stamp of merit, and was Sheridan to assume to himself the right of giving that stamp? If Sheridan was magnificent enough to bestow a gold medal as an honorary mark of dramatic merit, he should have requested one of the Universities to choose the person on whom it should be conferred. Sheridan had no right to give a stamp of merit; it was counterfeiting Apollo's coin."

The Irishman's vanity, prodigality, and hasty assumption of an importance to which he had no right could scarcely be better exemplified—nor, perhaps, the reader will say, the privileged arrogance of the great critic. It is more easy to condone the careless extravagance of the one than the deliberate insolence of the other. The comment, however, is just enough; and so, perhaps, was his description of the Irishman's attempt to improve the elocution of his contemporaries. "What influence can Mr. Sheridan have upon the language of this great country by his narrow exertions?" asks the great lexicographer. "Sir, it is burning a candle at Dover to show light at Calais." But when Johnson says, "Sir, Sherry is dull, naturally dull: but it must have taken him a great deal of pains to become what we now see him. Such an excess of stupidity, sir, is not in nature"—we acknowledge the wit, but doubt the fact. Thomas Sheridan very likely wanted humour, and was unable to perceive when he made himself ridiculous, as in the case of the medal; but we want a great deal more evidence to induce us to believe that the son of the jovial Dublin priest, and the father of Sheridan the great, could have been dull. He was very busy—"bustling," as Boswell calls him, his schemes going to his head, his vanity and enthusiasm combined making him feel himself an unappreciated reformer—a prophet thrown away upon an ungrateful age. But stupidity had nothing to do with his follies. He was "a wrong-headed, whimsical man," Dr. Parr tells us, but adds, "I respected him, and he really liked me and did me some important services." "I once or twice met his (Richard Sheridan's) mother: she was quite celestial." Such are the testimonies of their contemporaries.

It was not long, however, that the pair were able to re-

main in London. There is a whimsical indication of the state of distress into which Thomas Sheridan soon fell in the mention by Boswell of "the extraordinary attention in his own country" with which he had been "honoured," by having had "an exception made in his favour in an Irish Act of Parliament concerning insolvent debtors." "Thus to be singled out," says Johnson, "by Legislature as an object of public consideration and kindness is a proof of no common merit." It was a melancholy kind of proof, however, and one which few would choose to be gratified by. The family went to France, leaving their boys at Harrow, scraping together apparently as much as would pay their expenses there—no small burden upon a struggling man. And at Blois, in 1766, Mrs. Sheridan died. "She appears," says Moore, "to have been one of those rare women who, united to men of more pretensions but less real intellect than themselves, meekly conceal this superiority even from their own hearts, and pass their lives without a remonstrance or murmur in gently endeavouring to repair those evils which the indiscretion or vanity of their partners have brought upon them." Except that she found him at seven an impenetrable dunce, there is no record of any tie of sympathy existing between Mrs. Sheridan and her brilliant boy.

He had not perhaps, indeed, ever appeared in this character during his mother's lifetime. At Harrow he made but an unsatisfactory appearance. "There was little in his boyhood worth communication," says Dr. Parr, whose long letter on the subject all Sheridan's biographers quote; "he was inferior to many of his schoolfellows in the ordinary business of a school, and I do not remember any one instance in which he distinguished himself by Latin or English composition, either in prose or verse." This is

curious enough; but it is not impossible that the wayward boy, if he did adventure himself in verse, would think it best to keep his youthful compositions sacred from a master's eye. Verse writers, both in the dead languages and in the living, flourished at Harrow in those days of whom no one has heard since, "but Richard Sheridan aspired to no rivalry with either of them." Notwithstanding this absence of all the outward show of talent, Parr was not a man to remain unconscious of the glimmer of genius in the Irish boy's bright eyes. When he found that Dick would not construe as he ought, he laid plans to take him with craft, and "did not fail to probe and tease him":

"I stated his case with great good humour to the upper master, who was one of the best tempered men in the world: and it was agreed between us that Richard should be called oftener and worked more severely. The varlet was not suffered to stand up in his place, but was summoned to take his station near the master's table, where the voice of no prompter could reach him; and in this defenceless condition he was so harassed that he at last gathered up some grammatical rules and prepared himself for his lessons. While this tormenting process was inflicted upon him I now and then upbraided him. But you will take notice that he did not incur any corporal punishment for his idleness: his industry was just sufficient to keep him from disgrace. All the while Sumner and I saw in him vestiges of a superior intellect. His eye, his countenance, his general manner, were striking; his answers to any common question were prompt and acute. We knew the esteem and even admiration which somehow or other all his schoolfellows felt for him. He was mischievous enough, but his pranks were accompanied by a sort of vivacity and cheerfulness which delighted Sumner and myself. I had much talk with him about his apple loft, for the supply of which all the gardens in the neighbourhood were taxed, and some of the lower boys were employed to furnish it. I threatened, but without asperity, to trace the depredators through his associates up to the leader. He with perfect good humour set me at defiance, and I never could bring home the charge to him. All boys and all masters were pleased with him."

The amount of "good humour" in this sketch is enough to make the Harrow of last century look like a paradise; and the humorous torture to which young Sheridan was subjected shows a high sense of the appropriate either in "the best tempered man in the world," or in the learned doctor who loved to set forth his own doings and judgment in the best light, and had the advantage of telling his story after events had shown what the pupil was. Parr, however, modestly disowns the credit of having developed the intellectual powers of Sheridan, and neither were they stimulated into literary effort by Sumner, the head-master of Harrow, who was a friend of his father, and had, therefore, additional opportunities of knowing the boy's capabilities. "We both of us discovered great talents which neither of us were capable of calling into action while Sheridan was a schoolboy," Parr says. In short, it is evident that the boy, always popular and pleasant, amusing and attracting his schoolfellows, and on perfectly amicable terms with the masters, even when he was doubtful about his lesson, took no trouble whatever with his work, and cared nothing for the honours of school. He kept himself afloat, and that was all. His sins were not grievous in any way. He had it not in his power to be extravagant, for Thomas Sheridan in his bankrupt condition must have had hard enough ado to keep his boys at Harrow at all. But it is very clear that neither scholarship nor laborious mental exertion of any kind tempted him. He took the world lightly and gaily, and enjoyed his schoolboy years all the more that there was nothing of the struggle of young ambition in them. When his family came back from France, shortly after the mother's death, it is with a little gush of enthusiasm that his sister describes her first meeting after

long separation with the delightful brother whom she had half-forgotten, and who appears like a young hero in all the early bloom of seventeen, with his Irish charm and his Harrow breeding, to the eyes of the little girl, accustomed, no doubt, to shabby enough gentlemen in the cheap retreats of English poverty in France:

"He was handsome, not merely in the eyes of a partial sister, but generally allowed to be so. His cheeks had the glow of health, his eyes—the finest in the world—the brilliancy of genius, and were soft as a tender and affectionate heart could render them. The same playful fancy, the same sterling and innoxious wit that was shown afterwards in his writings, cheered and delighted the family circle. I admired—I almost adored him!"

No doubt the handsome, merry boy was a delightful novelty in the struggling family, where even the girls were taught to mouth verses, and the elder brother had begun to accompany his father on his half-vagabond career as a lecturer, to give examples of the system of elocution upon which he had concentrated all his faculties. After a short stay in London the family went to Bath, where for a time they settled, the place in its high days of fashion being propitious to all the arts. The father, seldom at home, lived a hard enough life, lecturing, teaching, sometimes playing, pursuing his favourite object as hotly as was practicable through all the struggles necessary to get a living, such as it was, now abundant, now meagre, for his family; while the girls and boys lived a sort of hap-hazard existence in the gay city, getting what amusement they could—motherless, and left to their own resources, yet finding society of a sufficiently exciting kind among the visitors with whom the town overflowed, and the artist-folk who entertained them. Here, while Charles worked with his father, Richard would seem to have done nothing at all, but doubtless

strolled about the fashionable promenade among the bucks and beaux, and heard all that was going on, and saw the scandal-makers nod their heads together, and the officers now and then arrange a duel, and Lydia Languish ransack the circulating libraries. They were all about in those lively streets, Mrs. Malaprop deranging her epitaphs, and Sir Lucius with his pistols always ready, and the little waiting-maid tripping about the scene with Delia's letters and *Broken Vows* under her arm. The young gentleman swaggering among them saw everything without knowing it, and remembered those familiar figures when the time came; but in the meanwhile did nothing, living pleasantly with his young sisters, no doubt very kind to them, and spending all the money the girls could spare out of their little housekeeping, and falling in love, the most natural amusement of all.

It is wrong, however, to say that he was entirely idle. At Harrow he had formed an intimate friendship with a youth more ambitious than himself, the Nathaniel Halhed whom Dr. Parr chronicles as having "written well in Latin and Greek." With this young man Sheridan entered into a sort of literary partnership both in classical translation and dramatic composition. Their first attempt was a farce called *Jupiter;* the subject being the story of Ixion, in which, curiously enough, the after-treatment of the *Critic* is shadowed forth in various points, the little drama being in the form of a rehearsal before a tribunal not unlike that to which Mr. Puff submits his immortal tragedy. Simile, the supposed author, indeed, says one or two things which are scarcely unworthy of Puff. The following passage occurs in a scene in which he is explaining to his critics the new fashion of composition, how the music is made first, and "the sense" afterwards (a process no ways astonish-

ing to the present generation), and how "a complete set of scenes from Italy" is the first framework of the play which "some ingenious hand" writes up to. "By this method," says one of the wondering commentators, "you must often commit blunders?"—

"*Simile.* Blunders! to be sure I must, but I always could get myself out of them again. Why, I'll tell you an instance of it. You must know I was once a journeyman sonnet-writer to Signor Squaltini. Now, his method, when seized with the *furor harmonicus*, was constantly to make me sit by his side, while he was thrumming on his harpsichord, in order to make extempore verses to whatever air he should beat out to his liking. I remember one morning as he was in this situation—*thrum, thrum, thrum* (moving his fingers as if beating on the harpsichord)—striking out something prodigiously great, as he thought—'Hah!' said he; 'hah! Mr. Simile—*thrum, thrum, thrum*—by gar, him is vary fine—write me some words directly.' I durst not interrupt him to ask on what subject, so instantly began to describe a fine morning—

> Calm was the land and calm the skies,
> And calm the heaven's dome serene,
> Hush'd was the gale and hush'd the breeze,
> And not a vapour to be seen.

"I sang it to his notes. 'Hah! upon my word, vary pritt—*thrum, thrum, thrum.* Stay, stay! Now, upon my word, here it must be an adagio. *Thrum, thrum, thrum.* Oh! let it be an Ode to Melancholy.'

"*Monop.* The devil! then you were puzzled sure—

"*Sim.* Not in the least! I brought in a cloud in the next stanza, and matters, you see, came about at once.

"*Monop.* An excellent transition.

"*O'Cl.* Vastly ingenious, indeed.

"*Sim.* Was it not, very? It required a little command—a little presence of mind."

When the rehearsal begins the resemblance is still more perfect, though there is no reproduction either of the plot or characters introduced. We are not told how much

share Halhed had in the composition: it was he who furnished the skeleton of the play, but it is scarcely possible that such a scene as the above could be from any hand but Sheridan's. This youthful effort was never finished. It was to have brought in a sum of money, which they both wanted much, to the young authors: "The thoughts," Halhed says, "of £200 shared between us are enough to bring the water into one's eyes." Halhed, then at Oxford, wanted the money above all things to enable him to pay a visit to Bath, where lived the young lady whom all these young men adored; and young Sheridan, who can doubt, required it for a thousand uses. But they were both at an age when a great part of pleasure lies in the planning, and when the mind is easily diverted to another and another new beginning. A publication of the *Tatler* type was the next project, to be called (one does not know why) *Hernan's Miscellany;* but this never went further than a part composition of the first number, which is somewhat feeble and flippant, as the monologue of an essayist of that old-fashioned type, if not under any special inspiration, is apt to be. Finally the young men succeeded in producing a volume of so-called translations from a dubious Latin author called Aristænetus, of whom no one knows much, and on whom at least it was very easy for them to father the light and frothy verses, which no one was likely to seek for in the original—if an original existed. Their preface favours the idea that the whole business was a literary hoax by which they did not even expect their readers to be taken in. *Aristænetus* got itself published, the age being fond of classics rubbed down into modern verse, but does not seem to have done any more. The two young men were in hopes that Sumner, their old master, "and the wise few of their acquaintance," would talk about the

book, and perhaps discover the joint authorship, and help them to fame and profit. But these hopes were not realised, as indeed they did not in the least deserve to be. They were flattered by being told that Johnson was supposed to be the author, which must have been a friendly invention; and Halhed tried to believe that "everybody had read the book," and that the second part, vaguely promised in the preface on condition of the success of the first, "should be published immediately, being of opinion that the readers of the first volume would be sure to purchase the second, and that the publication of the second would put it into the heads of others to buy the first"—a truly business-like argument, which, however, did not convince the booksellers. It seems a pity to burden the collection of Sheridan's works now with these unprofitable verses, which were never acknowledged, and did not even procure for young Halhed, who wanted it so much, the happiness of a visit to Bath, or a sight of the object of his boyish adoration.

It is the presence of this lady which gives interest and romance to the early chapter of Sheridan's life, and the record cannot go further without bringing her in. There flourished at Bath in those days a family called by Dr. Burney, in his *History of Music*, a nest of nightingales—the family of Linley, the composer, who had been for years at the head of musical enterprise in the district, the favourite singing-master, the conductor of all the concerts, a man whom Bath delighted to honour, and whose fame spread over England by means of the *beau monde* which took the waters in that city of pleasure. The position that such a man takes in a provincial town has become once more so much like what it was in the latter half of last century, when Handel was at Windsor and

England in one of its musical periods, that it will be easily realised by the reader. The brevet rank, revocable at the pleasure of society, which the musical family obtains, its admission among all the fine people, the price it has to pay for its elevation, and the vain hope that it is prized for its own personal qualities, which flatters it while in its prime of attraction—the apparent equality, nay, almost superiority, of the triumphant musicians among their patrons, who yet never forget the real difference between them, and whose homage is often little more than a form of insult—give a dramatic interest to the group such as few possess. This was the position held by the Linleys among the fine people of Bath. There were beautiful girls in the musician's house, which was always open, hospitable, and bright, and where a perpetual flutter of admiration and compliments, half affectionate, half humorous, the enthusiasm of a coterie, was in the ears of the young creatures in all their early essays in art. Men of wealth and sometimes of rank, the gentlemen of the neighbourhood, the officers and the wits—all friends of Linley, and glad to invite him to club and coffee-house and mess-room—were always about to furnish escorts and a flattering train wherever the young singers went. The eldest daughter, Elizabeth—or Eliza, as it was the fashion of the time to shorten and vulgarise that beautiful name—was a lovely girl of sixteen when the young Sheridans became known about Bath. Her voice was as lovely as her face, and she was the *prima donna* of her father's concerts, going with him to sing at festivals in other cathedral towns, and often to Oxford, where she had turned the head of young Halhed and of many an undergraduate besides. In Bath the young men were all at her feet, and not only the young men, as was natural, but the elder and less innocent members of

society. That the musician and his wife might have entertained hopes or even allowed themselves to be betrayed into not entirely unjustifiable schemings to marry their beautiful child to somebody who would raise her into a higher sphere, may well be believed. One such plan, indeed, it is evident did exist, which the poor girl herself foiled by making an artless confession to the man whom her parents had determined she should marry—"Mr. Long, an old gentleman of considerable fortune," who had the magnanimity to take upon himself the burden of breaking the engagement, and closed the indignant father's mouth by settling a little fortune of £3000 upon the young lady.

A danger escaped in this way, however, points to many other pitfalls among which her young feet had to tread, and one at least of a far more alarming kind has secured for itself a lasting place in her future husband's history. There is a curious letter[1] extant, which is printed in all Sheridan's biographies, and in which Eliza gives an account to a dear friend and confidant of the toils woven around her by one of her father's visitors, a certain Captain Matthews, who, though a married man and much older than herself, had beguiled the simple girl into a prolonged and clandestine sentimental correspondence. The sophisticated reader, glancing at this quaint production, without thought of the circumstances or the person, would probably conclude that there was harm in it, which it is very certain from all that is said and done besides did not exist; but the girl in her innocence evidently felt that the stolen intercourse, the whisperings aside, the man's prot-

[1] Mrs. Norton, in a preliminary sketch to an intended history of the Sheridans, never written, denies the authenticity of this letter with a somewhat ill-directed family pride; but no doubt has been thrown upon it by any of Sheridan's biographers.

estations of fondness, and despair if she withdrew from him, and her own half-flattered, half-frightened attraction towards him, were positive guilt. The letter, indeed, is Lydia Languish from beginning to end—the Lydia Languish of real life without any genius to trim her utterance into just as much as is needful and characteristic—and in consequence is somewhat tedious, long-winded, and confused; but her style, something between Clarissa Harlowe and Julia Mannering, is quite appropriate at once to the revelation and the period. The affair to which her letter refers has occupied far too much space, we think, in the story of Sheridan's life, yet it is a curious exposition of the time, the class, and the locality. The Maid of Bath, as she was called, had many adorers. Young Halhed, young Charles Sheridan—neither of them with much to offer—followed her steps wherever she moved, and applauded to the echo every note she sang, as did many another adorer; while within the busy and full house the middle-aged visitor, her father's so-called friend, had a hundred opportunities for a whispered word, a stolen caress, half permissible for the sake of old friendship, and because, no doubt, he had known her from a child. But even at sixteen the eyes of a girl accustomed to so many tributes would soon be opened, and the poor Lydia became alarmed by the warmth of her half-paternal lover and by the secrecy of his communications. This was her position at the time the Sheridans appear upon the scene.

The new influence immediately began to tell. Miss Linley and Miss Sheridan became devoted friends—and the two brothers "on our first acquaintance both professed to love me." She gave them no hope "that I should ever look upon them in any other light than as brothers of my friend," but yet "preferred the youngest,"

as "by far the most agreeable in person, beloved by every one, and greatly respected by all the better sort of people." Richard Sheridan, it would seem, immediately assumed the position of the young lady's secret guardian. He made friends with Matthews, became even intimate with him, and thus discovered the villanous designs which he entertained; while, on the other hand, he obtained the confidence of the lady, and became her chief adviser. It was a curious position for a young man—but he was very young, very poor, without any prospects that could justify him in entering the lists on his own account; and while he probably succeeded in convincing Miss Linley that his love for her was subdued into friendship, he seems to have been able to keep his secret from all his competitors, and not to have been suspected by any of them. In the heat of the persecution by Matthews, who resisted all her attempts to shake off his society, frightening her by such old-fashioned expedients as threatening his own life, and declaring that he could not live without seeing her, incessant consultations were necessary with the young champion who knew the secret, and whose advice and countenance were continually appealed to. No doubt they met daily in the ordinary course at each other's houses; but romance made it desirable that they should find a secret spot where Eliza could confide her troubles to Richard, and he warn her and encourage her in her resistance. "A grotto in Sydney Gardens" is reported to have been the scene of these meetings. On one occasion the anxious adviser must have urged his warnings too far, or insisted too warmly upon the danger of her position, for she left him angrily, resenting his interference; and this was the occasion of the verses addressed to Delia which he left upon the seat of the grotto for her, with an apparently well-justified but

somewhat rash confidence that they would fall into other hands. In this, after celebrating the "moss-covered grotto of stone" and the dew dripping willow that overshadows it, he unfolds the situation as follows:

"This is the grotto where Delia reclined,
As late I in secret her confidence sought;
And this is the tree kept her safe from the wind,
As, blushing, she heard the grave lesson I taught.

"Then tell me, thou grotto of moss-covered stone;
And tell me, thou willow with leaves dripping dew,
Did Delia seem vexed when Horatio was gone,
And did she confess her resentment to you?

"Methinks now each bough as you're waving it tries
To whisper a cause for the sorrow I feel,
To hint how she frowned when I dared to advise,
And sigh'd when she saw that I did it with zeal.

"True, true, silly leaves, so she did, I allow;
She frowned, but no rage in her looks did I see;
She frowned, but reflection had clouded her brow;
She sigh'd, but perhaps 'twas in pity for me.

* * * * * *

"For well did she know that my heart meant no wrong—
It sank at the thought but of giving her pain;
But trusted its task to a faltering tongue,
Which err'd from the feelings it could not explain.

"Yet oh! if indeed I've offended the maid,
If Delia my humble monition refuse,
Sweet willow, the next time she visits thy shade,
Fan gently her bosom, and plead its excuse.

"And thou, stony grot, in thy arch may'st preserve
Two lingering drops of the night-fallen dew;
And just let them fall at her feet, and they'll serve
As tears of my sorrow intrusted to you."

This is not very fine poetry; but it is very instructive as to the curious complication of affairs. It would not have suited Captain Absolute to play such a part; but Lydia Languish, amid all the real seriousness of the dilemma, no doubt would have derived a certain comfort from the romantic circumstances altogether—the villain, on one hand, threatening to lay his death at her door; the modest, self suppressed adorer, on the other, devoting himself to her service; the long, confidential conferences in the dark and damp little shelter behind the willow; the verses left on the seat—nothing could have been more delightful to a romantic imagination.

But the excitement heightened as time went on; and the poor girl was so harassed and persecuted by the man whose suit was a scandal, that she tried at last, she tells us, to take poison, as the only way of escape for her, searching for and finding in Miss Sheridan's room a small phial of laudanum, which had been used for an aching tooth, and which was too small apparently to do any harm. After this tremendous evidence of her miserable state, Sheridan, who would seem to have confined himself hitherto to warnings and hints, now disclosed the full turpitude of Matthews's intentions, and showed her a letter in which the villain announced that he had determined to proceed to strong measures, and if he could not overcome her by pleadings meant to carry her off by force. "The moment I read this horrid letter I fainted, and it was some time before I could recover my senses sufficiently to thank Mr. Sheridan for opening my eyes." But the question now was, what was to be done? For the poor girl seems to have had no confidence in her father's power of protecting her, and probably knew the inexpediency of embroiling him with his patrons. The two young creatures laid

their foolish heads together in this crisis of t
thoroughly frightened, the youth full of chiv
mination to protect her, and doubtless not w
headed young lover's hope to turn it to his
tage. He proposed that she should fly to
there take refuge in a convent till the dang
over. His own family had left France only
before, and the sister, who was Eliza's f
recommend her to the kind nuns at St. Q
she had herself been brought up. "He w
me to protect me, and after he had seen n
would return to England and place my con
a light that the world would applaud and
me."

Such was the wonderful expedient by wh
culties of this terrible crisis were surmounted.
was ill and the house in great disorder, and
of the accidental commotion young Sheridan
agitated girl into a chair—his sister, who was
and, no doubt, in high excitement too, comin
help her to pack up her clothes; and tha
posted off to London. "Sheridan had enga
of one of his servants to go with me as a
my knowledge. You may imagine how pl
with his delicate behaviour." This last parti
the very heights of chivalry, for, no doubt,
been quite a different matter to the impass
conduct the flight with a commonplace matr
his post-chaise between him and his beautifu
of the *tête-à-tête* which he might so easily
Next day they crossed the Channel to the
port of Dunkirk and were safe.

And it would seem that the rash young lo

honest and really meant to carry out this mad project; for she did eventually reach her convent, whither he attended her with punctilious respect. But when they were fairly launched upon their adventurous career either common sense or discreet acquaintances soon made it apparent to the young man that a youth and a maiden, however virtuous, cannot rove about the world in this way without comment, and that there was but one thing to be done in the circumstances. Perhaps Miss Linley had begun to feel something more than the mere "preference for the youngest," which she had so calmly announced, or perhaps it was only the desperate nature of the circumstances that made her yield. But, however that may be, the two fugitives went through the ceremony of marriage at Calais, though they seem to have separated immediately afterwards, carrying out the high sentimental and Platonic romance to the end.

It is a curious commentary, however, upon the prodigality of the penniless class to which Sheridan belonged that he could manage to start off suddenly upon this journey out of Thomas Sheridan's shifty household, where money was never abundant, a boy of twenty, with nothing of his own—hurrying up to London with post-horses, and hiring magnificently "the wife of one of his servants" to attend upon his love. The words suggest a retinue of retainers, and the journey itself would have taxed the resources of a youth much better endowed than Sheridan. Did he borrow, or run chivalrously into debt? or how did he manage it? His sister "assisted them with money out of her little fund for household expenses," but that would not go far. Perhaps the friend in London (a "respectable brandy-merchant") to whom he introduced Miss Linley as an heiress who had eloped with him, may have helped

on such a warrant to furnish the funds. But there is nothing more remarkable than the ease with which these impecunious gallants procure post-chaises, servants, and luxuries in those dashing days. The young men think nothing of a headlong journey from Bath to London and back again, which, notwithstanding all our increased facilities of locomotion, penniless youths of to-day would hesitate about. To be sure, it is possible that credit was to be had at the livery-stables, whereas, fortunately, none is possible at the railway-station. Post-horses seem to have been an affair of every day to the heroes of the Crescent and the Parade.

Meanwhile everything was left in commotion at home. Charles Sheridan, the elder brother, had left Bath and gone to the country in such dejection, after Miss Linley's final refusal of his addresses, as became a sentimental lover. When Richard went off triumphant with the lady his sisters were left alone, in great excitement and agitation; and their landlord, thinking the girls required "protection," according to the language of the time, set out at break of day to bring back the rejected from his retirement. The feelings of Charles on finding that his younger brother, whom even the girls did not know to be a lover of Miss Linley, had carried off the prize, may be imagined. But the occasion of the elopement, the designing villain of the piece—the profligate whose pursuit had driven the lady to despair—was furious. Miss Linley had, no doubt, left some explanation of the extraordinary step she was taking with her parents, and Sheridan appears to have taken the same precaution and disclosed the reasons which prompted her flight. When Matthews heard of this he published the following advertisement in a Bath newspaper:

"Mr. Richard S * * * * * * * having attempted, in a letter left behind him for that purpose, to account for his scandalous method of running away from this place by insinuations derogatory to *my* character and that of a young lady innocent so far as relates to *me* or *my* knowledge; since which he has neither taken any notice of letters, or even informed his own family of the place where he has hid himself: I can no longer think he deserves the treatment of a gentleman, and therefore shall trouble myself no further about him than, in this public method, to post him as a L * * * and a treacherous S * * * * * * * *

"And as I am convinced there have been many malevolent incendiaries concerned in the propagation of this infamous lie, if any of them, unprotected by age, infirmities, or profession, will dare to acknowledge the part they have acted, and affirm *to* what they have said *of* me, they may depend on receiving the proper reward of their villainy in the most public manner."

This fire-eating paragraph was signed with the writer's name, and it may be imagined what a delightful commotion it made in such a metropolis of scandal and leisure, and with what excitement all the frequenters of the Pump-room and the assemblies looked for the next incident. Some weeks elapsed before they were satisfied, but the following event was striking enough to content the most sensational imagination. It would seem to have been April before a clue was found to the fugitives, and Linley started at once from Bath to recover his daughter. He found her, to his great relief, doubtless, in the house of an English doctor in Lisle, who had brought her there from her convent, and placed her under his wife's care to be nursed when she was ill. Everything, it was evident, had been done in honour, and the musician seems to have been so thankful to find things no worse that he took the young people's explanations in good part. He would even seem to have made some sort of conditional promise that she should no longer be compelled to perform in public after

she had fulfilled existing engagements, and so brought her back peacefully to Bath. Richard, who in the mean time, in his letters home, had spoken of his bride as Miss L., announcing her settlement in her convent, without the slightest intimation of any claim on his part upon her, seems to have returned with them; but no one, not even Miss Linley's father, was informed of the Calais marriage, which seems, in all good faith, to have been a form gone through in case any scandal should be raised, but at present meaning nothing more. And Bath, with all its scandal-mongers, at a period when the general imagination was far from delicate, seems to have accepted the escapade with a confidence in both the young people, and entire belief in their honour, which makes us think better both of the age and the town. We doubt whether such faith would be shown in the hero and heroine of a similar freak in our own day. Young Sheridan, however, came home to no peaceable reception. He had to meet his indignant brother, in the first place, and to settle the question raised by the insulting advertisement of Matthews, which naturally set his youthful blood boiling. Before his return to Bath he had seen this villain in London, who had the audacity to disclaim the advertisement and attribute it to Charles Sheridan—a suggestion which naturally brought the young man home furious. The trembling sisters, delighted to welcome Richard, and eager to know all about his adventure, had their natural sentiments checked by the gloomy looks with which the brothers met, and went to bed reluctantly that first evening, hearing the young men's voices high and angry, and anticipating with horror a quarrel between them. Next morning neither of them appeared. They had gone off again with those so-easily-obtained post-horses to London.

A terrible time of waiting ensued; the distracted girls ran to the Linleys, but found no information there. They expected nothing better than to hear of a duel between their brothers for the too-charming Eliza's sake.

Hitherto all has been the genteelest of comedy, in fine eighteenth-century style: the villain intriguing, the ardent young lover stealing the lady out of his clutches, and Lydia Languish herself not without a certain delight in the romance, notwithstanding all her flutterings: the post-chaise dashing through the night, the alarms of the voyage, the curious innocent delusion of the marriage, complaisant priest and homely confidant, and guardian-bridegroom, with a soul above every ungenerous advantage. But the following act is wildly sensational. The account of the brawl that follows is given at length by all Sheridan's biographers. It is scarcely necessary to say that when the brothers, angry as both were, had mutually explained themselves, it was not to lift unnatural hands against each other that they sallied forth, while the girls lay listening and trembling up-stairs, but to jump once more into a post-chaise, and rattle over the long levels of the Bath road to town through the dewy chill of a May night, which did nothing, however, towards cooling their hot blood. Before leaving Bath, Richard had flashed forth a letter to the Master of the Ceremonies, informing him that Matthews's conduct had been such that no verbal apology could now be accepted from him. The first step the hero took on arriving in London was to challenge the villain, who, indeed, would seem to have behaved as infamously as the most boldly-drawn villain on the stage could be represented as doing. And then comes a most curious scene. The gentlemen with their rapiers go out to the Park, walking out together about six in the even-

ing—apparently a time when the Park was almost empty; but on various pretences the offender declines to fight there, with an air of endeavouring to slip out of the risk altogether. After several attempts to persuade him to stand and draw, the party, growing more and more excited, at length go to a coffee-house, "The Castle Tavern, Henrietta Street"—having first called at two or three other places, where their heated looks would seem to have roused suspicion. Their march through the streets in the summer evening on this strange errand, each with his second, the very sword quivering at young Richard's side and the blood boiling in his veins, among all the peaceful group streaming away from the Park, is wonderful to think of. When they got admittance at last to a private room in the tavern the following scene occurs:

"Mr. Ewart [the second of Sheridan] took lights up in his hand, and almost immediately on our entering the room we engaged. I struck Mr. Matthews's point so much out of the line that I stepped up and caught hold of his wrist, or the hilt of his sword, while the point of mine was at his breast. You [the letter is addressed to the second on the other side] ran in and caught hold of my arm, exclaiming, 'Don't kill him!' I struggled to disengage my arm, and said his sword was in my power. Mr. Matthews called out twice or thrice, 'I beg my life.' You immediately said 'There! he has begged his life, and now there is an end of it;' and on Mr Ewart's saying that when his sword was in my power, as I attempted no more, you should not have interfered, you replied that you were wrong, but that you had done it hastily and to prevent mischief—or words to that effect. Mr. Matthews then hinted that I was rather obliged to your interposition for the advantage: you declared that before you did so both the swords were in Mr. Sheridan's power. Mr. Matthews still seemed resolved to give it another turn, and observed that he had never quitted his sword. Provoked at this, I then swore (with too much heat, perhaps) that he should either give up his sword and I would break it, or go to his guard again. He refused—but on my

persisting either gave it into my hand, or flung it on the table or the ground (which, I will not absolutely affirm). I broke it and flung the hilt to the other end of the room. He exclaimed at this. I took a mourning sword from Mr. Ewart, and, presenting him with mine, gave my honour that what had passed should never be mentioned by me, and he might now right himself again. He replied that he 'would never draw a sword against the man that had given him his life;' but on his still exclaiming against the indignity of breaking his sword (which he brought upon himself), Mr. Ewart offered him the pistols, and some altercation passed between them. Mr. Matthews said that he could never show his face if it were known that his sword was broke—that such a thing had never been done—that it cancelled all obligations, etc. You seemed to think it was wrong, and we both proposed that if he never misrepresented the affair it should not be mentioned by us. This was settled. I then asked Mr. Matthews, as he had expressed himself sensible of and shocked at the injustice and indignity he had done me by his advertisement, whether it did not occur to him that he owed me another satisfaction; and that as it was now in his power to do it without discredit, I supposed he would not hesitate. This he absolutely refused, unless conditionally. I insisted on it, and said I would not leave the room till it was settled. After much altercation, and with much ill grace, he gave the apology."

There could not be a more curious scene. The outdoor duel is familiar enough both to fact and fiction; but the flash of the crossing swords, the sudden rush, the altercations of the angry group, the sullen submission of the disarmed bully, going on by the light of the flaring candles, in an inn-parlour, while the ordinary bustle of the tavern proceeded peacefully below, is as strange a picture as we can remember. Sheridan's account of the circumstances was made in answer to another, which stated them, as he asserts, falsely. The brothers returned home on Tuesday morning (they had left Bath on Saturday night), "much fatigued, not having been in bed since they left home," with Matthews's apology, and

triumph in their hearts, to the great consolation and relief of the anxious girls. But their triumph was not to be so easy. The circumstances of the duel oozed out, as most things do, and Matthews, stung by shame, challenged Sheridan again, choosing pistols as the weapons, *prior to swords*, "from a conviction that Mr. Sheridan would run in on him and an ungentlemanly scuffle probably be the consequence." This presentiment very evidently was justified; for the pistols were not used, and the duel ended in a violent scuffle — not like the usual dignified calm which characterises such deadly meetings. Matthews broke his sword upon Sheridan's ribs. The two antagonists fell together, Sheridan, wounded and bleeding, underneath, while the elder and heavier man punched at him with his broken sword. They were separated at length by the seconds, Sheridan refusing to "beg his life." He was carried home very seriously wounded, and, as was believed, in great danger. Miss Linley was singing at Oxford at the time, and while there Sheridan's wounded condition and the incident altogether was concealed from her, though everybody else knew of it and of her connection with it. When it was at last communicated to her she almost betrayed their secret, which even now nobody suspected, by a cry of "My husband! my husband!" which startled all who were present, but was set down to her excitement and distress, and presently forgotten.

This tremendous encounter closed the episode. Matthew had vindicated his courage and obliterated the stigma of the broken sword; and though there was at one moment a chance of a third duel, thenceforward we hear little more of him. Sheridan recovered slowly under the care of his sisters, his father and brother being again ab-

sent, and not very friendly. "We neither of us could approve of the cause in which you suffer," Charles writes. "All your friends here [in London] condemn you." The brother, however, has the grace to add that he is "unhappy at the situation I leave you in with respect to money matters," and that "Ewart was greatly vexed at the manner of your drawing for the last twenty pounds;" so that it seems the respectable brandy-merchant had been the family stand-by. The poor young fellow's position was miserable enough—badly wounded, without a shilling, his love seduously kept away from him, and the bond between them so strenuously ignored, that he promised his father, with somewhat guilty disingenuousness, that he never would marry Miss Linley. Life was altogether at a low ebb with him. When he got better he was sent into the country, to Waltham Abbey, no doubt by way of weaning him from all the seductions of Bath, and the vicinity of the lovely young singer, who had resumed her profession, though she hated it, and was to be seen of all men except the faithful lover who was her husband, though nobody knew.

Before we conclude this chapter of young life, which reads so like an argument to the *Rivals* or some similar play, we may indicate some of Sheridan's early productions which, common as the pretty art of verse-making was, showed something more than the facile knack of composition, which is one of what were entitled in that day "the elegant qualifications" of golden youth. Sacred to Eliza Linley, as well as the verses about "the moss-covered grotto," was the following graceful snatch of song, which is pretty enough to be got by heart and sung by love-sick youths in many generations to some pretty, *rococo* air as fantastic as itself:

"Dry be that tear, my gentlest love,
Be hush'd that struggling sigh;
Nor seasons, day, nor fate shall prove
More fix'd, more true than I.
Hush'd be that sigh, be dry that tear;
Cease boding doubt, cease anxious fear;
Dry be that tear.

"Ask'st thou how long my love will stay,
When all that's new is past?
How long, ah! Delia, can I say
How long my life will last?
Dry be that tear, be hush'd that sigh.
At least I'll love thee till I die.
Hush'd be that sigh.

"And does that thought affect thee too,
The thought of Sylvio's death,
That he who only breath'd for you
Must yield his faithful breath?
Hush'd be that sigh, be dry that tear,
Nor let us lose our heaven here.
Dry be that tear."

Moore, with a pedantry which is sufficiently absurd, having just traced an expression in the "moss-covered grotto" to a classical authority, though with a doubt, very favourable to his own scholarship, "whether Sheridan was likely to have been a reader of Augurianus," finds a close resemblance in the above to "one of the madrigals of Montreuil," or perhaps to "an Italian song of Ménage." Very likely it resembled all those pretty things, the *rococo* age being not yet over, and such elegant trifles still in fashion—as, indeed, they will always be as long as youth and its sweet follies last.

Other pretty bits of verse might be quoted, especially one which brings in another delightful literary association

into the story. Lady Margaret Fordyce—the beloved sister at whose departure from the old home in Fife Lady Anne Lindsay was so dejected, that to console herself she sang the woes, more plaintive still than her own, of that immortal peasant lass who married Auld Robin Gray—was then in Bath, and had been dismissed by a local versifier in his description of the beauties of the place by a couplet about a dimple, which roused young Sheridan's wrath. "Could you," he cries, addressing the poetaster—

> "Could you really discover,
> In gazing those sweet beauties over,
> No other charm, no winning grace,
> Adorning either mind or face,
> But one poor dimple to express
> The quintessence of loveliness?
>
> "Mark'd you her cheek of rosy hue?
> Mark'd you her eye of sparkling blue?
> That eye in liquid circles moving,
> That cheek abash'd at man's approving;
> The one Love's arrows darting round,
> The other blushing at the wound;
> Did she not speak, did she not move,
> Now Pallas—now the Queen of Love?"

The latter lines are often quoted, but it is pretty to know that it was of Lady Anne's Margaret that they were said.

It is probably also to his period of seclusion and leisure at Waltham that the early dramatic attempts found by Moore among the papers confided to him belong. One of these runs to the length of three acts, and is a work of the most fantastic description, embodying, so far as it goes, the life of a band of outlaws calling themselves Devils,

who have their head-quarters in a forest and keep the neighbourhood in alarm. The heroine, a mysterious and beautiful maiden, is secluded in a cave, from which she has never been allowed to go out, nor has she ever seen the face of man, except that of the old hermit, who is her guardian. She has been permitted, however, one glimpse of a certain young huntsman, whom she considers a phantom, until a second sight of him, when he is taken prisoner by the robbers, and unaccountably introduced into the cave where she lies asleep, convinces her of his reality, and naturally has the same effect upon her which the sudden apparition of Prince Ferdinand had upon Miranda. The scene is pretty enough as the work of a sentimental youth in an age addicted to the highflown everywhere, and especially on the stage. The hero, when unbound and left to himself, begins his soliloquy, as a matter of course, with a "Ha! where am I?" but changes his tone from despair to rapture when he sees the fair Reginilla whose acquaintance he had so mysteriously made. "Oh, would she but wake and bless this gloom with her bright eyes!" he says, after half a page. "Soft; here's a lute: perhaps her soul will know the call of harmony." Mrs. Radcliffe's lovely heroines, at a still later period, carried their lutes about with them everywhere, and tuned them to the utterance of a favourite copy of verses in the most terrible circumstances; so that the discovery of so handy an instrument in a robber's cave occasioned no surprise to the young hero. The song he immediately sung has been, Moore confesses, manipulated by himself. "I have taken the liberty of supplying a few rhymes and words that are wanting," he says, so that we need not quote it as an example of Sheridan. But the performance has its desired effect, and the lady wakes:

"*Reg.* (*waking*) The phantom, father! (*Seizes his hand.*) Oh, do not do not wake me thus!

"*Huntsman* (*kneeling*). Thou beauteous sun of this dark world, that mak'st a place so like the cave of death a heaven to me, instruct me how I may approach thee how address thee and not offend.

"*Reg.* Oh, how my soul could hang upon those lips! Speak on! And yet methinks he should not kneel. Why are you afraid, sir? Indeed I cannot hurt you.

"*Hunts.* Sweet innocence, I am sure thou would'st not.

"*Reg.* Art thou not he to whom I told my name, and did'st thou not say thine was

"*Hunts.* Oh! blessed was the name that then thou told'st—it has been ever since my charm and kept me from distraction. But may I ask how such sweet excellence as thine could be hid in such a place?

"*Reg.* Alas! I know not—for such as thou I never saw before, nor any like myself.

"*Hunts.* Nor like thee ever shall; but would'st leave this place, and live with such as I am?

"*Reg.* Why may not you live here with such as I?

"*Hunts.* Yes, but I would carry thee where all above an azure canopy extends, at night bedropt with gems, and one more glorious lamp that yields such beautiful light as love enjoys; while underneath a carpet shall be spread of flowers to court the presence of thy step, with such sweet whispered invitations from the leaves of shady groves or murmuring of silver streams, that thou shalt think thou art in Paradise.

"*Reg.* Indeed!

"*Hunts.* Ay, and I'll watch and wait on thee all day, and cull the choicest flowers, which while thou bind'st in the mysterious knot of love, I'll tune for thee no vulgar lays, or tell thee tales shall make thee weep, yet please thee, while thus I press thy hand, and warm it thus with kisses.

"*Reg.* I doubt thee not—but then my Governor has told me many a tale of faithless men, who court a lady but to steal her peace. . . . Then, wherefore could'st thou not live here? For I do feel, though tenfold darkness did surround this spot, I would be blest would you but stay here; and if it make you sad to be imprisoned thus, I'd sing and play for thee, and dress thee sweetest fruits, and though

you chide me would kiss thy tears away, and hide my blushing face upon thy bosom; indeed I would. Then what avails the gaudy days, and all the evil things I'm told inhabit them, to those who have within themselves all that delight and love and heaven can give?

"*Hunts.* My angel, thou hast indeed the soul of love.

"*Reg.* It is no ill thing, is it?

"*Hunts.* Oh, most divine—it is the immediate gift of heaven—"

And then the lute is brought into requisition once more. Other scenes of a much less superfine description, in one of which the hero takes the semblance of a dancing bear, go on outside this sentimental retirement; and some humour is expended on the trial of various prisoners secured by the robbers, who are made to believe that they have left this world and are being brought up before a kind of Pluto for judgment. This inflexible judge orders "baths of flaming sulphur and the caldron of boiling lead" for one who confesses himself to have been a courtier. The culprit's part, however, is taken by a compassionate devil, who begs that he may be soaked a little first in scalding brimstone, to prepare him for his final sentence.

Another unfinished sketch called the *Foresters* deals with effects not quite so violent. To the end of life Sheridan would threaten smilingly to produce this play and outdo everything else with it, but the existing framework seems to have been of the very slightest. Probably to a much later period belongs the projected play upon the subject of *Affectation*, for which were intended many memorandums found written upon the paper books in which his thoughts were noted. The subject is one which, in the opinion of various critics, would have been specially adapted to Sheridan's powers, and Moore, and many others following him, express regret that it should have been abandoned. But no doubt Sheridan's instinct warned him that on no such

set plan could his faculties work, and that the stage, however adapted to the display of individual eccentricities, wants something more than a bundle of embodied *fads* to make its performances tell. Sir Bubble Bon, Sir Peregrine Paradox, the representative "man who delights in hurry and interruption," the "man intriguing only for the reputation of it," the "lady who affects poetry," and all the rest, do well enough for the table-talk of the imagination, or even to jot down and play with in a note-book; but Sheridan was better inspired than to attempt to make them into a play. He had already among these memorandums of his the first ideas of almost all his future productions, the primitive notes afterwards to be developed into the brilliant malice of the scandalmongers, the first conception of old Teazle, the earliest adumbration of the immortal Puff. But the little verses which we have already quoted were the best of his actual achievements at this early period, dictated as they were by the early passion which made the careless boy into a man.

At least one other poetical address of a similar description —stilted, yet not without a tender breath of pastoral sweetness —was addressed to Eliza after she became Sheridan's wife, and told how Silvio reclined upon "Avon's ridgy bank"—

> "Did mock the meadow's flowing pride,
> Rail'd at the dawn and sportive ring;
> The tabour's call he did deride,
> And said, It was not Spring.
>
> "He scorned the sky of azure blue,
> He scorned whate'er could mirth bespeak;
> He chid the beam that drank the dew,
> And chid the gale that fanned his glowing cheek.
> Unpaid the season's wonted lay,
> For still he sighed and said, It was not May."

Which is, of course, explained by the circumstance that Delia (for the nonce called Laura) was not there. Laura responded in verses not much worse. It was a pretty commerce, breathing full of the time when shepherds and shepherdesses were still the favourites of dainty poetry—a fashion which seems in some danger of returning with the other quaintnesses of the time. But this was after the young pair were united; and in 1772, when he had recovered of his wounds, and was making what shift he could to occupy himself in the solitude of Waltham, studying a little for a variety, reading up the History of England and the works of Sir William Temple, by way of improving his mind, that blessed event seemed distant and unlikely enough.

In the Lent of 1773 Miss Linley came to London, to sing in the oratorios, and it is said that young Sheridan resorted to the most romantic expedients to see her. He was near enough to "tread on the heels of perilous probabilities"—a phrase which Moore quotes from one of his letters—and is said to have come from Waltham to London, and to have disguised himself as a hackney coachman, and driven her home from her performances on several occasions. The anonymous author of *Sheridan and his Times* asserts that on one of these occasions, by some accident, the lady was alone, and that this opportunity of communication led to a series of meetings, which at length convinced the parents that further resistance was hopeless. During all this time, it would appear, the marriage at Calais was never referred to, and was thought nothing of, even by the parties most concerned. It was intended apparently as a safeguard to Delia's reputation should need occur, but as nothing more; which says a great deal for the romantic generosity of so ardent a lover and so penni-

less a man. For Delia had her little fortune, besides all the other charms which spoke so much more eloquently to her Silvio's heart, and was indeed a liberal income in herself, to any one who would take advantage of it, with that lovely voice of hers. But the young man was romantically magnanimous and highflying in his sense of honour. He was indeed a very poor match—a youth without a penny, even without a profession, and no visible means of living—for the adored siren, about whom wealthy suitors were dangling by the dozen, no doubt exciting many anxious hopes in the breasts of her parents, if not in her own faithful bosom. But love conquered in the long run, as an honest and honourable sentiment, if it lasts and can wait, is pretty sure to do. In April, 1773, about a year from the time of their clandestine marriage at Calais, they were married in the eye of day, with all that was needful to make the union dignified and respectable; and thus the bustling little romance, so full of incident, so entirely ready for the use of the drama, so like all the favourite stage-combinations of the time, came to an end. We do not hear very much of Mrs. Sheridan afterwards; indeed, except the letter to which we have referred, she does little to disclose her personality at any time, but there is something engaging and attractive—a sort of faint but sweet reflection—raying out from her through all her life. The Lydia Languish of early days—the sentimental and romantic heroine of so many persecutions and pursuits, of the midnight flight and secret marriage—developed into one of those favourites of society, half-artist, half-fine-lady, whose exertions for the amusement of the world bring nothing to them but a half-fictitious position and dangerous flatteries, without even the public singer's substantial reward—a class embracing many charming and attractive

women, victims of their own gifts and graces. Mrs. Sheridan was, however, at the same time—at least, in all the early part of her career—a devoted wife, and seems to have done her best for her brilliant husband, and formed no small item in his success as well as in his happiness as long as her existence lasted. It is said that she disliked the life of a singer, and it is certain that she acquiesced in his resolution to withdraw her from all public appearances; but even in that point it is very likely that there was some unconsidered sacrifice in her submission. "Hers was truly a voice as of the church choir," says a contemporary quoted by Moore, "and she was always ready to sing without any pressing. She sang here a great deal, and to my infinite delight; but what had a peculiar charm was, that she used to take my daughter, then a child, on her lap, and sing a number of childish songs with such a playfulness of manner and such a sweetness of look and voice as was quite enchanting."

CHAPTER II.

HIS FIRST DRAMATIC WORKS.

MARRIED at last and happy, after so much experience of disappointment and hope deferred, Sheridan and his young wife took a cottage in the country, and retired there to enjoy their long-wished-for life together, and to consider an important, but it would seem not absolutely essential, point—what they were to do for their living. Up to this point they have been so entirely the personages of a drama, that it is quite in order that they should retire to a rose-covered cottage, with nothing particular to live upon; and that the young husband, though without any trade of his own by which he could earn a dinner, should magnificently waive off all offers of employment for his wife, who had a trade—and a profitable one. He was still but twenty-two and she nineteen, and he had hitherto managed to get all that was necessary, besides post-chaises and a considerable share of the luxuries of the time, as the lilies get their bravery, without toiling or spinning; so that it is evident the young man confronted fate with very little alarm, and his proud attitude of family head and master of his own wife is in the highest degree edifying as well as amusing. We can scarcely help doubting greatly whether a *prima donna* even of nineteen would let herself be disposed of now by such an absolute authority. The

tone of the letter in which he communicates to his father-in-law his lofty determination in this respect will show the young men of to-day the value of the privileges which they have, it is to be feared, partially resigned:

"Yours of the 3d instant did not reach me till yesterday, by reason of its missing us at Morden. As to the principal point it treats of, I had given my answer some days ago to Mr. Isaac, of Worcester. He had enclosed a letter from Storace to my wife, in which he dwells much on the nature of the agreement you had made for her eight months ago, and adds that 'as this is no new application, but a request that you (Mrs. S.) will fulfil a positive engagement, the breach of which would prove of fatal consequence to our meeting, I hope Mr. Sheridan will think his honour in some degree concerned in fulfilling it.' Mr. Storace, in order to enforce Mr. Isaac's argument, showed me his letter on the same subject to him, which begins with saying, 'We must have Mrs. Sheridan somehow or other if possible, the plain English of which is that if her husband is not willing to let her perform, we will persuade him that he acts *dishonourably* in preventing her from fulfilling a positive engagement.' This I conceive to be the very worst mode of application that could have been taken; as there really is not common-sense in the idea that my *honour* can be concerned in my wife's fulfilling an engagement which it is impossible she should ever have made. Nor (as I wrote to Mr. Isaac) can you who gave the promise, whatever it was, be in the least charged with the breach of it, as your daughter's marriage was an event which must always have been looked to by them as quite as natural a period to your rights over her as her death. And in my opinion it would have been just as reasonable to have applied to you to fulfil your engagement in the latter case than in the former. As to the imprudence of declining this engagement, I do not think, even were we to suppose that my wife should ever on any occasion appear again in public, there would be the least at present. For instance, I have had a gentleman with me from Oxford (where they do not claim the least right as from an engagement) who has endeavoured to place the idea of my complimenting the University with Betsey's performance in the strongest light of advantage to me. This he said on my declining to let her perform on any agreement. He likewise

informed me that he had just left Lord North (the Chancellor), who, he assured me, would look upon it as the highest compliment, and had expressed himself so to him. Now, should it be a point of inclination or convenience to me to break my resolution with regard to Betsey's performing, there surely would be more sense in obliging Lord North (and probably from his own application) than Lord Coventry and Mr. Isaac; for were she to sing at Worcester, there would not be the least compliment in her performing at Oxford."

The poor pretty wife, smiling passive in the background while my young lord considers whether he will "compliment the University" with her performance, is a spectacle which ought to be impressive to the brides of the present day, who take another view of their position; but there is a delightful humour in this turning of the tables upon the stern father who had so often snubbed young Sheridan, and who must have regarded, one would suppose, his present impotence and the sublime superiority of the new proprietor of Betsey with anything but pleasant feelings. Altogether the attitude of the group is very instructive in view of the changes of public opinion on this point. The most arbitrary husband nowadays would think it expedient at least to associate his wife's name with his own in any such refusal; but the proprietorship was undoubting in Sheridan's day. It will be remembered that Dr. Johnson highly applauded the young gentleman's spirit and resolution in this point.

However, though she had so soon become Betsey and his property, so far as business was concerned, the cottage at East Burnham, among the beech-trees and roses, still contained a tender pair of lovers; and Silvio still addressed to Delia the sweetest compliments in verse. When he is absent he appeals to Hymen to find something for him to do to make the hours pass when away from her:

"Alas! thou hast no wings, oh, Time;
It was some thoughtless lover's rhyme,
Who, writing in his Chloe's view,
Paid her the compliment through you.
For had he, if he truly lov'd,
But once the pangs of absence prov'd,
He'd cropt thy wings, and in their stead
Have painted thee with heels of lead."

Thus Betsey's chains were gilded; and in all likelihood she was totally unconscious of them, never having been awakened to any right of womankind beyond that of being loved and flattered. The verse is not of very high quality, but the sentiment is charming, and entirely appropriate to the position:

"For me who, when I'm happy, owe
No thanks to Fortune that I'm so,
Who long have learn'd to look at one
Dear object, and at one alone,
For all the joy and all the sorrow
That gilds the day or threats the morrow.
I never felt thy footsteps light
But when sweet love did aid thy flight,
And banished from his blest dominion,
I car'd not for thy borrowed pinion.
True, she is mine; and since she's mine
At trifles I should not repine;
But, oh! the miser's real pleasure
Is not in knowing he has treasure;
He must behold his golden store,
And feel and count his riches o'er.
Thus I, of one dear gem possest,
And in that treasure only blest,
There every day would seek delight,
And clasp the casket every night."

The condition of the young pair in any reasonable point of view at this beginning of their life was as little hopeful

as can be conceived. The three thousand pounds left to Miss Linley by Mr. Long was their sole fortune, if it still remained intact. The wife was rendered helpless by the husband's grand prohibition of her exertions, and he himself had nothing to do, nor knew how to do anything; for even to literature, that invariable refuge, he scarcely seems as yet to have turned his eyes with any serious intent. The manner in which they plunged into life, however, is characteristic. When winter made their Burnham cottage undesirable, and the time of honey-mooning was well over, they went to town to live with the composer Storace, where no doubt Betsey's talent was largely exercised, though not in public, and probably helped to make friends for the young pair; for we hear of them next year as paying visits, among other places, at the house of Canning; and in the winter of 1774 they established themselves in Orchard Street, Portman Square, in a house of their own, furnished, an anonymous biographer says, "in the most costly style," at the expense of Linley, with perhaps some contribution from that inexhaustible three thousand pounds:

"His house was open," says this historian, "for the reception of guests of quality attracted by his wit, the superior accomplishments of his wife, and the elegance of his entertainments. His dinners were upon the most expensive scale, his wines of the finest quality; while Mrs. Sheridan's *soirées* were remarkable not more for their brilliance than the gay groups of the most beautiful, accomplished, and titled lady visitants of the Court of St. James. Mrs. Sheridan's routs were the great attraction of the season. A friend—a warm and sincere friend—remonstrating with Sheridan on the instability of his means of supporting such a costly establishment, he tersely replied, 'My dear friend, it is my means.'"

Such a description will be taken for what it is worth, but there seems internal evidence that the anecdote with

which it concludes might have been true. And certainly, for a young man beginning the arduous occupation of living on his wits, a pretty house and prettier wife and good music would form an excellent stock-in-trade; and the new home itself being entirely beyond any visible means they had, every other prodigality would be comprehensible. By this time he had begun the composition of a play, and considered himself on the eve of publishing a book, which, he "thinks, will do me some credit," as he informs his father-in-law, but which has never been heard of from that time to this, so far as appears. Another piece of information contained in the letter in which this apocryphal work is announced shows for the first time a better prospect for the young adventurer. He adds, "There will be a comedy of mine in rehearsal at Covent Garden within a few days":

"I have done it at Mr. Harris's (the manager's) own request: it is now complete in his hands, and preparing for the stage. He and some of his friends also who have heard it assure me in the most flattering terms that there is not a doubt of its success. It will be very well played, and Harris tells me that the least shilling I shall get (if it succeeds) will be six hundred pounds. I shall make no secret of it towards the time of representation, that it may not lose any support my friends can give it. I had not written a line of it two months ago, except a scene or two, which I believe you have seen in an odd act of a little farce."

This was the *Rivals*, which was performed at Covent Garden, on the 17th of January, 1775—nearly three years after his marriage. How he existed in the meantime, and made friends and kept up his London house, is left to the imagination. Probably it was done upon that famous three thousand pounds, which appears, like the widow's cruse, to answer all demands.

The *Rivals* was not successful the first night, and the hopes of the young dramatist must have met with a terrible check; but the substitution of one actor for another in the part of Sir Lucius O'Trigger, and such emendations as practical sense suggested as soon as it had been put on the stage, secured for it one continued triumph ever after. It is now more than a century since critical London watched the new comedy, and the hearts of the Linleys thrilled from London to Bath, and old Thomas Sheridan, still unreconciled to his son, came, silent and sarcastic, to the theatre to see what the young good-for-nothing had made of it; but the world has never changed its opinion. What a moment for Betsey in the house where she had everything that heart of woman could desire except the knowledge that all was honest and paid for—a luxury which outdoes all the rest—and for her husband, standing in the wings, watching his father's face, whom he dared not go and speak to, and knowing that his whole future hung in the balance, and that in case of success all his follies would be justified! "But now there can be no doubt of its success," cries little Miss Linley from Bath, in a flutter of excitement, "as it has certainly got through more difficulties than any comedy which has not met its doom the first night." The Linleys were convinced in their own minds that it was Mrs. Sheridan who had written "the much admired epilogue." "How I long to read it!" cries the little sister. "What makes it more certain is that my *father* guessed it was *yours* the first time he saw it praised in the paper." There is no reason to suppose that the guess was true, but it is a pretty exhibition of family feeling.

The *Rivals*—to the ordinary spectator who, looking on with uncritical pleasure at the progress of that episode of mimic life, in which everybody's remarks are full of such

a quintessence of wit as only a very few remarkable persons are able to emulate in actual existence, accepts the piece for the sake of these and other qualities—is so little like a transcript from any actual conditions of humanity that to consider it as studied from the life would be absurd, and we receive these creations of fancy as belonging to a world entirely apart from the real. But the reader who has accompanied Sheridan through the previous chapter of his history will be inclined, on the contrary, to feel that the young dramatist has but selected a few incidents from the still more curious comedy of life in which he himself had so recently been one of the actors, and in which elopements, duels, secret correspondences, and all the rest of the simple-artificial round, were the order of the day. Whether he drew his characters from the life it is needless to inquire, or if there was an actual prototype for Mrs. Malaprop. Nothing, however, in imagination is so highly fantastical as reality; and it is very likely that some two or three ladies of much pretension and gentility flourished upon the parade and frequented the Pump-room, from whose conversation her immortal parts of speech were appropriated; but this is of very little importance in comparison with the delightful success of the result. The *Rivals* is no such picture of life in Bath as that which, half a century later, in altered times, which yet were full of humours of their own, Miss Austen made for us in all the modest flutter of youthful life and hopes. Sheridan's brilliant dramatic sketch is slight in comparison, though far more instantly effective, and with a concentration in its sharp effects which the stage requires. But yet, no doubt, in the bustle and hurry of the successive arrivals, in the eager brushing up of the countryman new-launched on such a scene, and the aspect of the idle yet bustling

society, all agog for excitement and pleasure, the brisk little holiday city was delightfully recognisable in the eyes of those to whom "the Bath" represented all those vacation rambles and excursions over the world which amuse our leisure now. Scarcely ever was play so full of liveliness and interest constructed upon a slighter machinery. The Rivals of the title, by means of the most simple yet amusing of mystifications, are one person. The gallant young lover, who is little more than the conventional type of that well-worn character, but a manly and lively one, has introduced himself to the romantic heroine in the character of Ensign Beverley, a poor young subaltern, instead of his own much more eligible personality as the heir of Sir Anthony Absolute, a baronet with four thousand a year, and has gained the heart of the sentimental Lydia, who prefers love in a cottage to the finest settlements, and looks forward to an elopement and the loss of a great part of her fortune with delight: when his plans are suddenly confounded by the arrival of his father on the scene, bent on marrying him forthwith in his own character to the same lady. Thus he is at the same time the romantic and adored Beverley and the detested Captain Absolute in her eyes; and how to reconcile her to marrying peaceably and with the approval of all her belongings, instead of clandestinely and with all the *éclat* of a secret running away, is the problem. This, however, is solved precipitately by the expedient of a duel with the third rival, Bob Acres, which shows the fair Lydia that the safety of her Beverley, even if accompanied by the congratulations of friends and a humdrum marriage, is the one thing to be desired. Thus the whole action of the piece turns upon a mystification, which affords some delightfully comic scenes, but few of those occasions of sus-

pense and uncertainty which give interest to the drama. This we find in the brisk and delightful movement of the piece, in the broad but most amusing sketches of character, and the unfailing wit and sparkle of the dialogue. In fact, we believe that many an audience has enjoyed the play, and, what is more wonderful, many a reader laughed over it in private, without any clear realisation of the story at all, so completely do Sir Anthony's fits of temper, and Mrs. Malaprop's fine language and stately presence, and the swagger of Bob Acres, occupy and amuse us. Even Faulkland, the jealous and doubting, who invents a new misery for himself at every word, and finds an occasion for wretchedness even in the smiles of his mistress, which are always either too cold or too warm for him, is so laughable in his starts aside at every new suggestion of jealous fancy, that we forgive him not only a great deal of fine language, but the still greater drawback of having nothing to do with the action of the piece at all.

Mrs. Malaprop's ingenious "derangement of epitaphs" is her chief distinction to the popular critic; and even though such a great competitor as Dogberry has occupied the ground before her, those delightful absurdities have never been surpassed. But justice has hardly been done to the individual character of this admirable if broad sketch of a personage quite familiar in such scenes as that which Bath presented a century ago, the plausible, well-bred woman, with a great deal of vanity, and no small share of good-nature, whose inversion of phrases is quite representative of the blurred realisation she has of surrounding circumstances, and who is quite sincerely puzzled by the discovery that she is not so well qualified to enact the character of Delia as her niece would be. Mrs. Malaprop has none of the harshness of Mrs. Hardcastle, in *She*

Stoops to Conquer, and we take it unkind of Captain Absolute to call her "a weatherbeaten she-dragon." The complacent nod of her head, the smirk on her face, her delightful self-satisfaction and confidence in her "parts of speech," have nothing repulsive in them. No doubt she imposed upon Bob Acres; and could Catherine Morland and Mrs. Allen have seen her face and heard her talk, these ladies would, we feel sure, have been awed by her presence. And she is not unkind to Lydia, though the minx deserves it, and has no desire to appropriate her fortune. She smiles upon us still in many a watering-place—large, gracious, proud of her conversational powers, always a delightful figure to meet with, and filling the shop-keeping ladies with admiration. Sir Anthony, though so amusing on stage, is more conventional, since we know he must get angry presently whenever we meet him, although his coming round again is equally certain; but Mrs. Malaprop is never quite to be calculated upon, and is always capable of a new simile as captivating as that of the immortal "allegory on the banks of the Nile."

The other characters, though full of brilliant talk, cleverness, and folly, have less originality. The country hobbledehoy, matured into a dandy and braggart by his entrance into the intoxicating excitement of Bath society, is comical in the highest degree; but he is not characteristically human. While Mrs. Malaprop can hold her ground with Dogberry, Bob Acres is not fit to be mentioned in the same breath with the "exquisite reasons" of that delightful knight, Sir Andrew Aguecheek. And thus it becomes at once apparent that Sheridan's eye for a situation, and the details that make up a striking combination on the stage, was far more remarkable than his insight into human motives and action. There is no scene on the

stage which retains its power of amusing an ordinary audience more brilliantly than that of the proposed duel, where the wittiest of boobies confesses to feeling his valour ooze out at his finger-ends, and the fire-eating Sir Lucius promises, to console him, that he shall be pickled and sent home to rest with his fathers, if not content with the snug lying in the abbey. The two men are little more than symbols of the slightest description, but their dialogue is instinct with wit, and that fun, the most English of qualities, which does not reach the height of humour, yet overwhelms even gravity itself with a laughter in which there is no sting or bitterness. Molière sometimes attains this effect, but rarely, having too much meaning in him; but with Shakspeare it is frequent amongst higher things. And in Sheridan this gift of innocent ridicule and quick embodiment of the ludicrous without malice or *arrière-pensée* reaches to such heights of excellence as have given his nonsense a sort of immortality.

It is, however, difficult to go far in discussion or analysis of a literary production which attempts no deeper investigation into human nature than this. Sheridan's art, from its very beginning, was theatrical, if we may use the word, rather than dramatic. It aimed at strong situations and highly effective scenes rather than at a finely constructed story, or the working out of either plot or passion. There is nothing to be discovered in it by the student, as in those loftier dramas which deal with the higher qualities and developments of the human spirit. It is possible to excite a very warm controversy in almost any company of ordinarily educated people at any moment upon the character of Hamlet. And criticism will always find another word to say even upon the less profound but delightful mysteries of such a poetical creation

as Rosalind, all glowing with ever varied life and love and fancy. But the lighter drama with which we have now to deal hides no depths under its brilliant surface. The pretty, fantastical Lydia, with her romances, her impatience of ordinary life, her hot little spark of temper, was new to the stage, and when she finds a fitting representative can be made delightful upon it; but there is nothing further to find out about her. The art is charming, the figures full of vivacity, the touch that sets them before us exquisite: except, indeed, in the Faulkland scenes, probably intended as a foil for the brilliancy of the others, in which Julia's magnificent phrases are too much for us, and make us deeply grateful to Sheridan for the discrimination which kept him—save in one appalling instance—from the serious drama. But there are no depths to be sounded, and no suggestions to be carried out. While, however, its merits as literature are thus lessened, its attractions as a play are increased. There never was a comedy more dear to actors, as there never was one more popular on the stage. The even balance of its characters, the equality of the parts, scarcely one of them being quite insignificant, and each affording scope enough for a good player to show what is in him, must make it always popular in the profession. It is, from the same reason, the delight of amateurs.

Moore quotes from an old copy of the play a humorous dedication written by Tickell, Sheridan's brother-in-law, to Indolence. "There is a propriety in prefixing your name to a work begun entirely at your suggestion and finished under your auspices," Tickell says; and, notwithstanding his biographer's attempt to prove that Sheridan polished all he wrote with extreme care, and cast and recast his literary efforts, there is an air of ease and lightness in his

earlier work which makes the dedication sufficiently appropriate. It must have amused his own fancy while he wrote, as it has amused his audience ever since. It is the one blossom of production which had yet appeared in so many easy years. A wide margin of leisure, of pleasure, of facile life, extends around it. It was done quickly, it appears, when once undertaken—a pleasing variety upon the featureless course of months and years. The preface which Sheridan himself prefixed to the play when printed justifies itself on the score that "the success of the piece has probably been founded on a circumstance which the author is informed has not before attended a theatrical trial":

"I need scarcely add that the circumstance alluded to was the withdrawing of the piece to remove those imperfections in the first representation which were too obvious to escape reprehension, and too numerous to admit of a hasty correction. . . . It were unnecessary to enter into any further extenuation of what was thought exceptionable in this play, but that it has been said that the managers should have prevented some of the defects before its appearance to the public—and, in particular, the uncommon length of the piece as represented the first night. It were an ill return for the most liberal and gentlemanly conduct on their side to suffer any censure to rest where none was deserved. Hurry in writing has long been exploded as an excuse for an author; however, in the dramatic line, it may happen that both an author and a manager may wish to fill a chasm in the entertainment of the public with a hastiness not altogether culpable. The season was advanced when I first put the play into Mr. Harris's hands; it was at that time at least double the length of any acting comedy. I profited by his judgment and experience in the curtailing of it, till I believe his feeling for the vanity of a young author got the better of his desire for correctness, and he left so many excrescences remaining because he had assisted in pruning so many more. Hence, though I was not uninformed that the acts were still too long, I flattered myself that after the first trial I might with safer judgment proceed to remove what should appear to have been most dissatisfactory."

These were, it is true, days of leisure, when nothing was pushed and hurried on, as now. But it would require, one would think, no little firmness and courage on the part of a young author to risk the emendation of errors so serious after an unfavourable first-night, and a great confidence on the part of the manager to permit such an experiment. But there are some men who impress all around them with such a certainty of power and success, that even managers dare, and publishers volunteer, in their favour. Sheridan was evidently one of these men. There was an atmosphere of triumph about him. He had carried off his siren from all competitors; he had defied all inducements to give her up to public hearing after; he had flown in the face of prudence and every frugal tradition. And, so far as an easy and happy life went, he was apparently succeeding in that attempt. So he was allowed to take his unsuccessful comedy off the stage and trim it into his own guise of triumph. We are not told how long the interval was, which would have been instructive (the anonymous biographer says "a few days"). It was produced in January, however, and a month later we hear of it in preparation at Bath, where its success was extraordinary. The same witness, whom we have just quoted, adds that "Sheridan's prospective six hundred pounds was more than doubled by its success and the liberality of the manager."

He had thus entered fully upon his career as a dramatist. In the same year he wrote—in gratitude, it is said, to the Irish actor who had saved the *Rivals* by his felicitous representation of Sir Lucius—the farce called *St. Patrick's Day; or, the Scheming Lieutenant*, a very slight production, founded on the tricks, so familiar to comedy, of a lover's ingenuity to get entrance into the house of

his mistress. The few opening sentences, which are entirely characteristic of Sheridan, are almost the best part of the production: they are spoken by a party of soldiers coming with a complaint to their officer:

"1*st Sol.* I say, you are wrong; we should all speak together, each for himself, and all at once, that we may be heard the better.

"2*d Sol.* Right, Jack; we'll argue in platoons.

"3*d Sol.* Ay, ay, let him have our grievances in a volley."

The lieutenant, whose suit is scorned by the parents of his Lauretta, contrives, by the aid of a certain Dr. Rosy, a comic, but not very comic, somewhat long-winded personage, to get into the house of Justice Credulous, her father, as a servant; but is discovered and turned out. He then writes a letter asserting that, in his first disguise, he has given the Justice poison, an assertion which is met with perfect faith; upon which he comes in again as the famous quack doctor, so familiar to us in the pages of Molière. In this case the quack is a German, speaking only a barbarous jargon, but he speedily cures the Justice, on condition of receiving the hand of his daughter. "Did he say all that in so few words?" cries Justice Credulous, when one of the stranger's utterances is explained to him. "What a fine language it is!"—just as M. Jourdain delightedly acknowledged the eloquence of *la langue Turque*, which could express *tant de choses dans un seul mot*. The *Scheming Lieutenant* still keeps its ground among Sheridan's works, bound up between the *Rivals* and the *School for Scandal*, a position in which one cannot help feeling it must be much astonished to find itself.

In the end of the year the opera of the *Duenna* was also produced at Covent Garden. The praise and immediate appreciation with which it was received were still

greater than those that hailed the *Rivals*. "The run of this opera has, I believe, no parallel in the annals of the drama," says Moore, speaking in days when the theatre had other rules than those known among ourselves. "Sixty-three nights was the career of the *Beggar's Opera;* but the *Duenna* was acted no less than seventy-five times during the season," and the enthusiasm which it called forth was general. It was pronounced better than the *Beggar's Opera*, up to that time acknowledged to be the first and finest production of the never very successful school of English opera. Opera at all was as yet an exotic in England, and the public still resented the importation of Italian music and Italian singers to give it utterance, and fondly clung to the idea of being able to produce as good or better at home. The *Duenna* was a joint work, in which Sheridan was glad to associate with himself his father-in-law, Linley, whose airs to the songs, which were plentifully introduced—and which gave its name to what is in reality a short comedy on the lines of Molière, interspersed with songs, and not an opera in the usual sense of the word at all—were much commended at the time. The little lyrics which are put indiscriminately into the mouths of the different personages are often extremely pretty; but few people in these days have heard them sung, though lines from the verses are still familiar enough to our ears in the way of quotation. The story of the piece belongs to the same easy, artificial inspiration which dictated the trivial plot of *St. Patrick's Day*, and of so many others. It is "mainly founded," says Moore, "upon an incident borrowed from the *Country Wife* of Wycherley," but it seems hardly necessary to seek a parent for so *banal* a contrivance. The father, with whom we are all so familiar, has to be tricked out of his daughter by one of the monotonous lovers with

whom we are more familiar still; but instead of waiting till her gallant shall invent a plan for this purpose, the lady cuts the knot herself, by the help of her duenna, who has no objection to marry the rich Jew whom Louisa abhors, and who remains in the garb of her young mistress, while the latter escapes in the duenna's hood and veil. The Portuguese Isaac from whom the lady flies is a crafty simpleton, and when he finds the old duenna waiting for him under the name of Louisa (whom her father, for the convenience of the plot, has vowed never to see till she is married) he accepts her, though much startled by her venerable and unlovely appearance, as the beautiful creature who has been promised to him, with only the rueful reflection to himself, "How blind some parents are!" and, as she explains that she also has made a vow never to accept a husband from her father's hands, carries her off, as she suggests, with much simplicity and the astute reflection, "If I take her at her word I secure her fortune and avoid making any settlement in return." In the meantime two pairs of interesting lovers, Louisa and her Antonio, her brother Ferdinand and his Clara, are wandering about in various disguises, with a few quarrels and reconciliations, and a great many songs, which they pause to sing at the most inappropriate moments, after the fashion of opera. In order to be married—which all are anxious to be—Isaac and one of the young gallants go to a "neighbouring monastery," such establishments being delightfully handy in Seville, where the scene is laid; and the hot Protestantism of the audience is delighted by an ecclesiastical interior, in which "Father Paul, Father Francis, and other friars are discovered at a table drinking," singing convivial songs, and promising to remember their penitents in their cups, which will do quite as much good as masses. Father Paul

is the supposed ascetic of the party, and comes forward when called with a glass of wine in his hand, chiding them for having disturbed his devotions. The three couples are then married by this worthy functionary, and the whole ends with a scene at the house of the father, when the trick is revealed to him, and, amid general blessings and forgiveness, the Jew discovers that he has married the penniless duenna instead of the lady with a fortune, whom he has helped to deceive himself as well as her father. The duenna, who has been, like all the old ladies in these plays, the subject of a great many unmannerly remarks—when an old woman is concerned Sheridan's fine gentlemen always forget their manners—is revealed in all her poverty and ugliness beside the pretty young ladies; and Isaac's conceit and admiration of himself, "a sly little villain, a cunning dog," etc., are unmercifully laughed at; while the rest of the party make up matters with the easily mollified papa.

Such is the story. There is very little character attempted, save in Isaac, who is a sort of rudimentary sketch of a too cunning knave or artful simpleton caught in his own toils; and the dialogue, if sometimes clever enough, never for a moment reaches the sparkle of the *Rivals*. "The wit of the dialogue," Moore says—using that clever mist of words with which an experienced writer hides the fact that he can find nothing to say on a certain subject—"except in one or two instances, is of that amusing kind which lies near the surface—which is produced without effort, and may be enjoyed without wonder." If this means that there is nothing at all wonderful about it, it is no doubt true enough; though there are one or two phrases which are worth preserving, such as that in which the Jew is described as being "like the blank leaves between the Old

and New Testament," since he is a convert of recent date and no very certain faith.

It was, however, the music which made the piece popular, and the songs which Sheridan wrote for Linley's setting were many of them pretty, and all neat and clever. Everybody knows "Had I a heart for falsehood framed," which is sung by the walking gentleman of the piece, a certain Don Carlos, who has nothing to do but to take care of Louisa during her wanderings, and to sing some of the prettiest songs. Perhaps, on the whole, this is the best:

"Had I a heart for falsehood framed,
I ne'er could injure you;
For though your tongue no promise claim'd,
Your charms would make me true.
To you no soul shall bear deceit,
No stranger offer wrong;
But friends in all the aged you'll meet,
And lovers in the young.

"But when they learn that you have blest
Another with your heart,
They'll bid aspiring passion cease
And act a brother's part.
Then, lady, dread not here deceit,
Nor fear to suffer wrong;
For friends in all the aged you'll meet,
And lovers in the young."

The part of Carlos is put in, with Sheridan's usual indifference to construction, for the sake of the music, and in order to employ a certain tenor who was a favourite with the public, there being no possible occasion for him, so far as the dramatic action is concerned.

This is what Byron, nearly half a century after, called "the best opera" in English, and which was lauded to the

skies in its day. The *Beggar's Opera*, with which it is constantly compared, has, however, much outlived it in the general knowledge, if the galvanic and forced resurrection given by an occasional performance can be called life. The songs are sung no longer, and many who quote lines like the well-known "Sure such a pair were never seen" are in most cases totally unaware where they come from. Posterity, which has so thoroughly carried out the judgment of contemporaries in respect to the *Rivals*, has not extended its favour to the *Duenna*. Perhaps the attempt to conjoin spoken dialogue to any great extent with music is never a very successful attempt: for English opera does not seem to last. Its success is momentary. Musical enthusiasts care little for the "words," and not even so much for melody as might be desired; and the genuine playgoer is impatient of those interruptions to the action of a piece which has any pretence at dramatic interest, while neither of the conjoint arts do their best in such a formal copartnery. Sheridan, however, spared no pains to make the partnership successful. He was very anxious that the composer should be on the spot and secure that his compositions were done full justice to. "Harris is extravagantly sanguine of its success as to plot and dialogue," he writes; "they will exert themselves to the utmost in the scenery, etc.; but I never saw any one so disconcerted as he was at the idea of there being no one to put them in the right way as to music." "Dearest father," adds Mrs. Sheridan, "I shall have no spirits or hopes of the opera unless we see you." The young dramatist, however, had his ideas as to the music as well as the literary portion of the piece, and did not submit himself blindly to his father-in-law's experience. "The first," he says, "I should wish to be a pert, sprightly air, for though some of the words

mayn't seem suited to it, I should mention that they are neither of them in earnest in what they say: Leoni (Carlos) takes it up seriously, and I want him to show advantageously in the six lines beginning, 'Gentle Maid.' I should tell you that he sings nothing well but in a plaintive or pastoral style, and his voice is such as appears to me always to be hurt by much accompaniment. I have observed, too, that he never gets so much applause as when he makes a cadence. Therefore my idea is that he should make a flourish at 'Shall I grieve you.'" These instructions show how warmly Sheridan at this period of life interested himself in every detail of his theatrical work. Linley, it is said, had the good sense to follow these directions implicitly.

The success of the *Duenna* at Covent Garden put Garrick and his company at the rival theatre on their mettle; and it was wittily said that "the old woman would be the death of the old man." Garrick chose the moment when her son was proving so dangerous a rival to him to resuscitate Mrs. Sheridan's play called the *Discovery*, in which he himself played the chief part—a proceeding which does not look very friendly; and as Thomas Sheridan had been put forth by his enemies as the great actor's rival, it might well be that there was no very kind feeling between them. But the next chapter in young Sheridan's life shows Garrick in so benevolent a light that it is evident his animosity to the father, if it existed, had no influence on his conduct to the son. Garrick was now very near the close of his career; and when it was understood that he meant, not only to retire from the stage, but to resign his connection with the theatre altogether, a great commotion arose in the theatrical world. These were the days of patents, when the two great theatres held a sort of monopoly, and

were safe from all rivalship except that of each other. It was at the end of the year 1775 that Garrick's intention of "selling his moiety of the patent of Drury Lane Theatre" became known; and Richard Sheridan was then in the early flush of his success, crowding the rival theatre, and promising a great succession of brilliant work to come. But it could scarcely be supposed that a young man just emerging out of obscurity—rich, indeed, in his first gains, and no doubt seeing before him a great future, but yet absolutely destitute of capital—could have been audacious enough, without some special encouragement, to think of acquiring this great but precarious property, and launching himself upon such a venture. How he came to think of it we are left uninformed, but the first whisper of the chance seems to have inflamed his mind; and Garrick, whether or not he actually helped him with money, as some say, was at all events favourable to him from the beginning of the negotiations. He had promised that the refusal should first be offered to Colman; but when Colman, as he expected, declined, it was the penniless young dramatist whom of all competitors the old actor preferred. Sheridan had a certain amount of backing, though not enough, as far as would appear, to lessen the extraordinary daring of the venture—his father-in-law, Linley, who it is to be supposed had in his long career laid up some money, taking part in the speculation along with a certain Dr. Ford; but both in subordination to the young man who had no money at all. Here are Sheridan's explanations of the matter addressed to his father-in-law:

"According to his (Garrick's) demand, the whole is valued at £70,000. He appears very shy of letting his books be looked into as the test of the profits on this sum, but says it must be in its nature a purchase on speculation. However, he had promised me a

rough estimate of his own of the entire receipts for the last seven years. But after all it must certainly be a purchase on speculation without money's worth having been made out. One point he solemnly avers, which is that he will never part with it under the price above-mentioned. This is all I can say on the subject until Wednesday, though I can't help adding that I think we might safely give £5000 more on this purchase than richer people. The whole valued at £70,000, the annual interest is £3500; while this is cleared the proprietors are safe. But I think it must be infernal management indeed that does not double it."

A few days later the matter assumes a definite shape:

"Garrick was extremely explicit, and in short we came to a final resolution; so that if the necessary matters are made out to all our satisfactions, we may sign and seal a previous engagement within a fortnight.

"I meet him again to-morrow evening, when we are to name a day for a conveyancer on our side to meet his solicitor, Wallace. I have pitched on a Mr. Phipps, at the recommendation and by the advice of Dr. Ford. The three first steps to be taken are these—our lawyer is to look into the titles, tenures, etc., of the house and adjoining estate, the extent and limitations of the patent, etc.; we shall then employ a builder (I think Mr. Collins) to survey the state and repair in which the whole premises are, to which Mr. G. entirely consents; Mr. G. will then give us a fair and attested estimate from his books of what the profits have been, at an average, for these last seven years. This he has shown me in rough, and, valuing the property at £70,000, the interest has exceeded ten per cent.

"We should after this certainly make an interest to get the King's promise that while the theatre is well conducted, etc., he will grant no patent for a third, though G. seems confident he never will. If there is any truth in professions and appearances, G. seems likely always to continue our friend and to give every assistance in his power.

"The method of our sharing the purchase, I should think, may be thus—Ewart to take £10,000, you £10,000, and I £10,000. Dr. Ford agrees with the greatest pleasure to embark the other £5000; and, if you do not choose to venture so much, will, I daresay, share it with you. Ewart is preparing his money, and I have a certainty of

my part. We shall have a very useful ally in Dr. Ford, and my father offers his services on our own terms. We cannot unite Garrick to our interests too firmly; and I am convinced his influence will bring Leasy to our terms, if he should be ill-advised enough to desire to interfere in what he is totally unqualified for."

Ewart was the ever-faithful friend to whose house in London Sheridan had taken Miss Linley, whose son had been his second in the affair with Captain Matthews—a man upon whose support the Sheridan family could always rely. But the source from which young Richard himself got the money for his own share remains a mystery, of which no one has yet found the solution. "Not even to Mr. Linley," says Moore, "while entering into all other details, does he hint at the fountain-head from which the supply is to come," and he adds a few somewhat commonplace reflections as to the manner in which all Sheridan's successes had as yet been obtained:

"There was, indeed, something mysterious and miraculous about all his acquisitions, whether in love, in learning, in wit, or in wealth. How or when his stock of knowledge was laid in nobody knew: it was as much a matter of marvel to those who never saw him read as the mode of existence of the chameleon has been to those who fancied it never eat. His advances in the heart of his mistress were, as we have seen, equally trackless and inaudible, and his triumph was the first that even his rivals knew of his love. In like manner the productions of his wit took the world by surprise, being perfected in secret till ready for display, and then seeming to break from under the cloud of his indolence in full maturity of splendour. His financial resources had no less an air of magic about them; and the mode by which he conjured up at this time the money for his first purchase into the theatre remains, as far as I can learn, still a mystery."

These remarks are somewhat foolish, to say the least, since the mystery attending the sudden successes of a

young man of genius are sufficiently explained as soon as his possession of that incommunicable quality has once been established; and the triumph of a brilliant youth, whose fascinating talk and social attractions were one of the features of his age, over his commonplace rivals in the heart of a susceptible girl does not even require genius to explain it. But neither genius itself nor all the personal fascination in the world can, alas! produce, when it is wanted, ten thousand pounds. The anonymous author of *Sheridan and his Times* asserts confidently that Garrick himself advanced the money, having conceived a great friendship for Sheridan, and formed a strong opinion as to his capacity to increase the reputation and success of the theatre. Of this statement, however, no proof is offered, and Moore evidently gives no credence to such a suggestion, though he notices that it had been made. The money was procured by some friendly help, no doubt. There were, as has been said, only the two great theatres in these days, none of the later crop having as yet sprung up, and each being under the protection of a patent; the speculation, therefore, was not so hazardous as it has proved to be since. It is, however, besides the mystery about the money, a most curious transformation to see the young idler, lover, and man of pleasure suddenly placed at the head of such an undertaking, with so much responsibility upon his shoulders, and—accustomed only to the shiftless and hand-to-mouth living of extravagant poverty—become at once the administrator of a considerable revenue and the head of a little community dependent upon him. He had done nothing all his life except, in a fit of inspiration of very recent date, produce a couple of plays. But it does not seem that any doubt of his powers crossed his mind or that of any of his associates. "Do not flag when

we come to the point," he says to his father-in-law; "I'll answer for it we shall see many golden campaigns."

The stir and quickening of new energy is apparent in all he writes. The circumstances were such as might well quicken the steadiest pulse, for not only was he likely to lay a foundation of fortune for himself (and his first child had lately been born—"a very magnificent fellow"), but his nearest connexions on both sides were involved, and likely to owe additional comfort and importance to the young prodigal whose own father had disowned him, and his wife's received him with the greatest reluctance—a reflection which could not but be sweet. With such hopes in his mind, the sobriety and composure with which he writes are astonishing:

"Leasy is utterly unequal to any department in the theatre. He has an opinion of me, and is very willing to let the whole burden and ostensibility be taken off his shoulders. But I certainly should not give up my time and labour (for his superior advantage, having so much greater a share) without some conclusive advantage. Yet I should by no means make the demand till I had shown myself equal to the task. My father purposes to be with us but one year: and that only to give us what advantage he can from his experience. He certainly must be paid for his trouble, and so certainly must you. You have experience and character equal to the line you would undertake, and it never can enter into anybody's head that you were to give your time, or any part of your attention, gratis because you had a share in the theatre. I have spoken on the subject both to Garrick and Leasy, and you will find no demur on any side to your gaining a *certain* income from the theatre, greater, I think, than you could make out of it, and in this the theatre would be acting only for its own advantage."

The other shareholder, who held the half of the property—while Sheridan, Linley, and Ford divided the other half between them—was a Mr. Lacy; and there seems a

charming possibility of some reminiscence of the brogue, though Sheridan probably had never been touched by it in his own person, having left Ireland as a child—in the misspelling of the name. It is impossible not to sympathise with him in the delightful consciousness of having proved the futility of all objections, and become the aid and hope, instead of the detriment and burden, of both families, which must have sweetened his own brilliant prospects. His father evidently was now fully reconciled and sympathetic, proud of his son, and disposed (though not without a consideration) to give him the benefit of his experience and advice; and Linley was to have the chance of an income from the theatre "greater than he could make out of it." With what sweet moisture the eyes of the silenced Diva at home, the St. Cecilia whose mouth her young husband's adoring pride had stopped, must have glistened to think that her father, who had done all he could to keep her Sheridan at arm's length, was now to have his fortune made by that injured and unappreciated hero! She had other causes for happiness and glory. "Your grandson," Sheridan adds, in the same letter to Linley, "astonishes everybody by his vivacity, his talents for music and poetry, and the most perfect integrity of mind." Everything was now brilliant and hopeful about the young pair. The only drawback was the uneasiness of Sheridan's position, until the business should be finally settled, between the two theatres. "My confidential connexion with the other house," he says, "is peculiarly distressing till I can with prudence reveal my situation, and such a treaty, however prudently managed, cannot long be kept secret."

The matter was settled early in the year 1776, Sheridan being then twenty-five. Before the end of the year

troubles arose with Lacy, and it would seem that Sheridan took the strong step of retiring from the managership and carrying the actors along with him, leaving the other perplexed and feeble proprietor to do the best he could with such materials as he could pick up. All quarrels, however, were soon made up, and affairs proceeded amicably for some time; but Sheridan eventually bought Lacy out at a further expenditure of £45,000, partly obtained, it would appear, from Garrick, partly by other means. The narrative is not very clear, nor is it very important to know what squabbles might convulse the theatre, or how the friends of Lacy might characterise the "conceited young man," who showed no inclination to consult a colleague of so different a calibre from himself. But it seems to be agreed on all sides that the beginning of Sheridan's reign at Drury was not very prosperous. Though he had shown so much energy in his financial arrangements at the beginning, it was not easy to get over the habits of all his previous life, and work with the steadiness and regularity of a man of business, as was needful. There was an interval of dulness which did not carry out the hopes very naturally formed when the young dramatist who had twice filled the rival theatre with eager crowds and applause came to the head of affairs. Garrick, who had so long been its chief attraction, was gone; and it was a new group of actors, unfamiliar to him, with whom the new manager had to do. He remodelled for them a play of Vanbrugh's, which he called a *Trip to Scarborough*, but which, notwithstanding all he did to it, remained still the production of an earlier age, wanting in the refinement and comparative purity which Sheridan himself had already done so much to make popular. The Miss Hoyden, the rustic lady whom Lord Foppington is destined to

marry, but does not, is a creature of the species of Tony Lumpkin, though infinitely less clever and shrewd than that delightful lout, and has no sort of kindred with the pretty gentlewoman of Sheridan's natural period. And the public were not specially attracted by this *réchauffé*. In fact, after all the excitement and wonderful novelty of this astonishing launch into life, the reaction was great and discouraging. Old stock pieces of a repertory of which Garrick had been the soul — new contrivances of pantomime "expected to draw all the human race to Drury," and which were rendered absolutely necessary, "on account of a marvellous preparation of the kind which is making at Covent Garden" — must have fallen rather flat both upon the mind of the manager, still new and inexperienced in his office, and of the public, which no doubt at the hands of the author of the *Rivals*, and with the songs of the *Duenna* still tingling in its ears, expected great things. But this pause was only the *reculer pour mieux sauter* which precedes a great effort; for early in the next year Sheridan rose to the full height of his genius, and the *School for Scandal* blazed forth, a great Jupiter among the minor starlights of the drama, throwing the rival house and all its preparations altogether into the shade.

CHAPTER III.

THE "SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL."

It was clear that a great effort was required for the advantage of Drury Lane, to make up for the blow of Garrick's withdrawal, and to justify the hopes founded upon the new management; and Mr. Lacy and the public had both reason to wonder that the head which had filled Covent Garden from pit to gallery should do nothing for the house in which all his hopes of fortune were involved. No doubt the cares of management and administration were heavy, and the previous training of Sheridan had not been such as to qualify him for continuous labour of any kind; but at the same time it was not unnatural that his partners in the undertaking should have grumbled at the long interval which elapsed before he entered the lists in his own person. It was May, 1777, more than a year after his entry upon the proprietorship of Drury Lane, when the *School for Scandal* was produced, and then it was hurried into the hands of the performers piecemeal before it was finished, the last act finding its way to the theatre five days before the final production. The manuscript, Moore informs us, was issued forth in shreds and patches, there being but "one rough draft of the last five scenes, scribbled upon detached pieces of paper; while of all the preceding acts there are numerous transcripts, scat-

tered promiscuously through six or seven books, with new interlineations and memoranda to each. On the last leaf of all, which exists, just as we may suppose it to have been despatched by him to the copyist," Moore adds, "there is the following curious specimen of a doxology, written hastily, in the handwriting of the respective parties, at the bottom:

'Finished at last; thank God!
'R. B. Sheridan.
'Amen!
'W. Hawkins.'"

The bearer of the latter name was the prompter, and there is a whole history of hurry and anxiety and confusion, a company disorganised, and an unhappy functionary at the end of his powers, in this devout exclamation. It is bad enough to keep the press waiting, but a dozen or so of actors arrested in their study, and the whole business of the theatre depending upon the time at which a man of fashion got home from an entertainment, or saw his guests depart in the grey of the morning, is chaos indeed. "We have heard him say," writes a gossiping commentator, "that he had in those early days stolen from his bed at sunrise to prosecute his literary labours, or after midnight, when his visitors had departed, flown to his desk, and, at the cost of a bottle of port, sat down to resume the work which the previous morning in its early rising had dawned upon." The highly polished diction of the *School for Scandal*, and the high pressure of its keen and trenchant wit, does not look much like the excited work of the small hours inspired by port; but a man who is fully launched in the tide of society, and sought on all hands to give brilliancy to the parties of his patrons, must needs "steal a few hours from the night."

"It was the fate of Sheridan through life," Moore says, "and in a great degree his policy, to gain credit for excessive indolence and carelessness." It seems very likely that he has here hit the mark, and furnished an explanation for many of the apparently headlong feats of composition by which many authors are believed to have distinguished themselves. There is no policy which tells better. It is not merely an excuse for minor faults, but an extraordinary enhancement, in the eyes of the uninstructed, of merit of all kinds. To be able to dash off in a moment, at a sitting, what would take the laborious plodder a week's work, is a kind of triumph which is delightful both to the performer and spectator; and many besides Sheridan have found it a matter of policy to keep up such a character. The anonymous biographer whom we have already quoted is very angry with Moore for attempting to show that Sheridan did not dash off his best work in this reckless way, but studied every combination, and sharpened his sword by repeated trials of its edge and temper. The scientific critic has always scorned what the multitude admire, and the fashion of our own age has so far changed, that to show an elaborate process of workmanship for any piece of literary production, and if possible to trace its lineage to previous works and well-defined impulses and influences, is now the favourite object of the biographer and commentator. We confess a leaning to the primitive method, and a preference for the Minerva springing full-armed from the brain of Jove to the goddesses more gradually developed of scientific investigation.

But Moore's account of the growth of Sheridan's powers, and of the steps by which he ascended to the mastery of his art, are interesting and instructive. The *Rivals*

sprang into being without much thought, with that instinctive and unerring perception of the right points to recollect and record, which makes observation the unconscious instrument of genius, and is so immensely and indescribably different from mere imitation. But the *School for Scandal*—a more elaborate performance in every way—required a different handling. It seems to have floated in the writer's mind from the moment when he discovered his own powers, stimulating his invention and his memory at once, and prompting half a dozen beginnings before the right path was discovered. Now it is one story, now another, that attracts his fancy. He will enlist those gossiping circles which he feels by instinct to be so serviceable for the stage, to serve the purpose of a scheming woman and separate a pair of lovers. Anon, departing from that idea, he will employ them to bring about the catastrophe of a loveless marriage, in which an old husband and a young wife, the very commonplaces of comedy, shall take a new and original development. Two distinct stories rise in his mind, like two butterflies circling about each other, keeping him for a long time undecided which is the best for his purpose. The first plot is one which the spectator has now a little difficulty in tracing through the brilliant scenes which were originally intended to carry it out, though it is distinctly stated in the first scene, between Lady Sneerwell and Snake, which still opens the comedy. As it now stands this intimation of her ladyship's purpose is far too important for anything that follows, and is apt to mystify the spectator, who finds little in the after scenes to justify it—a confusion at once explained when we are made aware that this was the original *motif* of the entire piece, the object of which was to separate, not Charles Surface, but a sentimental hero called Clarimont, Florival, and

other pastoral names, from the Maria whom he loves, and who is the ward, niece, or even step-daughter of Lady Sneerwell, a beautiful widow and leader of scandal, who loves him. But while the author is playing with this plot, and designing fragmentary scenes in which to carry it out, the other is tugging at his fancy — an entirely distinct idea, with a group of new and individual characters: the old man and his wife, the two contrasted brothers, one of whom is to have the reputation of being her lover, while the other is the real villain. At first there is no connection whatever between the two. The *School for Scandal* proper is first tried. Here would seem to be the first suggestions of it, no doubt noted down at a venture for future use without any very definite intention, perhaps after a morning's stroll through the crowd which surrounded the waters of the Bath with so many bitternesses. There are here, the reader will perceive, no indications of character, or even names, to serve as symbols for the Crabtrees and Candours to come:

"The Slanderer. *A Pump-room Scene.*

"Friendly caution to the newspapers.

"It is whispered—

"She is a constant attendant at church, and very frequently takes Dr. M'Brawn home with her.

"Mr. Worthy is very good to the girl: for my part, I dare swear he has no ill intention.

"What! Major Wesley's Miss Montague?

"Lud, ma'am! the match is certainly broke. No creature knows the cause: some say a flaw in the lady's character, and others in the gentleman's fortune.

"To be sure, they do say—

"I hate to repeat what I hear—

"She was inclined to be a little too plump before they went—

"The most intrepid blush. I've known her complexion stand fire for an hour together."

Whether these jottings suggested the design, or were merely seized upon by that faculty of appropriating "son bien ou il le trouve," which is one of the privileges of genius, it is impossible to tell; but it will be seen that the germ of all the highly-wrought and polished scenes of the scandalous college is in them. The first use to which they were put is soon visible in the scene between Lady Sneerwell and Snake (called Spatter in the original) which opened the uncompleted play, and still stands, though with much less significance, at the beginning of the actual one. In this sketch Crabtree and Sir Benjamin Backbite appear as parties to the intrigue, the latter being the lover of Maria, and intended to embroil her with Clarimont, who is no gallant rake, like his prototype in the existing drama, but a piece of perfection, highly superior to the gossip—"one of your moral fellows . . . who has too much good-nature to say a witty thing himself, and is too ill-natured to permit it in others," and who is as dull as virtue of this abstract type is usually represented on the stage. To show the difference in the workmanship, we may quote the only portion of the old sketch which is identical in meaning with the perfected one. Lady Sneerwell and Spatter are, as in the first version, "discovered" when the curtain rises:

"*Lady S.* The paragraphs, you say, were all inserted?

"*Spat.* They were, madam.

"*Lady S.* Did you circulate the report of Lady Brittle's intrigue with Captain Boastall?

"*Spat.* Madam, by this time Lady Brittle is the talk of half the town: and in a week will be treated as a demirep.

"*Lady S.* What have you done as to the innuendo of Miss Nicely's fondness for her own footman?

"*Spat.* 'Tis in a fair train, ma'am. I told it to my hair dresser; he courts a milliner's girl in Pall Mall, whose mistress has a first cousin who is waiting-woman to Lady Clackitt. I think in about

fourteen hours it must reach Lady Clackitt, and then, you know, the business is done.

"*Lady S.* But is that sufficient, do you think?

"*Spat.* Oh Lud, ma'am! I'll undertake to ruin the character of the primmest prude in London with half as much. Ha, ha! Did your ladyship never hear how poor Miss Shepherd lost her lover and her character last summer at Scarborough? This was the whole of it. One evening at Lady ——'s the conversation happened to turn on the difficulty of feeding Nova Scotia sheep in England—"

The reader will recollect the story about the sheep, which is produced at a later period in the scene, under a different name in the actual version, as are Miss Nicely and her footman. To show, however, the improvement of the artist's taste, we will place beside the less perfect essay we have just quoted the scene as it stands:

"*Lady Sneer.* The paragraphs, you say, Mr. Snake, were all inserted?

"*Snake.* They were, madam; and as I copied them myself, in a feigned hand, there can be no suspicion whence they came.

"*Lady Sneer.* Did you circulate the report of Lady Brittle's intrigue with Captain Boastall?

"*Snake.* That's in as fine a train as your ladyship could wish. In the common course of things I think it must reach Mrs. Clackitt's ears within four-and-twenty hours, and then, you know, the business is as good as done.

"*Lady Sneer.* Why, truly Mrs. Clackitt has a very pretty talent, and a great deal of industry.

"*Snake.* True, madam, and has been tolerably successful in her day. To my knowledge she has been the cause of six matches being broken off, and three sons disinherited. . . . Nay, I have more than once traced her causing a *tête-a-tête* in *The Town and Country Magazine*, when the parties perhaps had never seen each other before in the course of their lives.

"*Lady Sneer.* She certainly has talents, but her manner is gross.

"*Snake.* 'Tis very true. She generally designs well, has a free tongue, and a bold invention; but her colouring is too dark, and her

outlines often extravagant. She wants that delicacy of tint and mellowness of sneer which distinguish your ladyship's scandal.

"*Lady Sneer.* You are partial, Snake.

"*Snake.* Not in the least; everybody allows that Lady Sneerwell can do more with a word and a look than many can with the most laboured detail, even when they happen to have a little truth on their side to support it."

It seems needless to reproduce the dull and artificial scenes which Moore quotes by way of showing how Sheridan floundered through the mud of commonplace before he found firm footing on the ground where he achieved so brilliant a success. They are like an artist's first experiments in design, and instructive only in that sense. Perhaps it was in the despair which is apt to seize the imagination when a young writer finds his performance so inadequate to express his idea that Sheridan threw the whole machinery of the scandalous circle aside and betook himself to the construction of the other drama which had got into his brain—the story of old Teazle and his young wife, and of the brothers Plausible or Pliant, or half a dozen names besides, as the fancy of their author varies. In the first sketch our friend Sir Peter, that caustic and polished gentleman, is Solomon Teazle, a retired tradesman, who maunders over his first wife, and his own folly, after getting rid of her, in encumbering himself with another; but after a very brief interval this beginning, altogether unsuitable to the writer's tastes and capabilities, changes insensibly into the more harmonious conception of the old husband as we know him. The shopkeeper was not in Sheridan's way. Such a *hobereau* as Bob Acres, with his apings of fashion, might come within his limited range, but it did not extend to those classes which lie outside of society. Trip and Fag and their fellows were strictly

within this circle; they are as witty as their masters in the hands of the dramatist, and rather more fine, as is the nature of a gentleman's gentleman; and even royalty itself must be content to share the stage with these indispensable ministers and copyists. But the world beyond was at all times a sealed book to this historian of fashionable folly—and he was wisely inspired in throwing over the plebeian. He seems very speedily to have found out his mistake, for nothing more is heard of Solomon; and in the next fragmentary scene the dramatist glides at once into a discussion of Lady Teazle's extravagances, in which we have a great deal of unmeaning detail, all cleared away like magic in the existing scene, which is framed upon it, yet is as much superior to it as a lively and amusing altercation can be to the items of a lengthy account interspersed with mutual recriminations. It would appear, however, that the Teazle play was subsequent to the Sneerwell one, for there is a great deal of pointed and brilliant writing, and much that is retained almost without change, in the first adumbrations of the great scenes with Joseph Surface. "So, then," says Lady Teazle, in this early sketch, "you would have me sin in my own defence, and part with my virtue to preserve my reputation," an epigrammatic phrase which is retained without alteration in the final scene. Moore tell us that this sentence is "written in every direction, and without any material change in its form, over the pages of his different memorandum-books." It is evident that it had caught Sheridan's fancy, and that he had favourite phrases, as some people have favourite children, produced on every possible occasion, and always delighted in.

How it was that Sheridan was led to amalgamate these two plays into one we are left altogether without informa-

tion. Moore's knowledge seems to have been drawn entirely from the papers put into his hands, which probably no one then living knew much about, belonging as they did to the early career of a man who had lived to be old, and abandoned altogether the walk of literature, in which he had won his early laurels. He surmises that the two-act comedy which Sheridan tells Linley is about to be put in rehearsal may have been the Teazle play; but this is mere conjecture, and we can only suppose that Sheridan had found, as he grew better acquainted with the requirements of the stage, that neither of the plots he had sketched out was enough to keep the interest of the audience; and that, in the necessity that pressed upon him for something to fill the stage and stop the mouths of his new company and associates, he threw the two plots together by a sudden inspiration, knitting the one to the other by the dazzling links of those scandalous scenes which, to tell the truth, have very little to do with either. Whether he transferred these bodily from an already polished and completed sketch, working them into the materials needed for his double intrigue with as little alteration of the original fabric as possible, or if in his haste and confidence of success he deliberately refrained from connecting them with the action of the piece, we have no way of telling. The daring indifference which he shows to that supposed infallible rule of dramatic composition which ordains that every word of the dialogue should help on the action, is edifying, and shows how entirely independent of rule is success. At the same time it strikes us as curious that Sheridan did not find it expedient to employ the evil tongues a little more upon the group of people whose fortunes are the immediate subject of the comedy. For instance, there is no warrant whatever in the play for

the suspicion of Charles Surface which Sir Peter expresses at an exciting moment. A hint of his character and impending troubles is indeed given us, but nothing that can in the least link his name with that of Lady Teazle—which seems a distinct inadvertence on the part of the dramatist, since there might have been an admirable opportunity for piquing our curiosity by a *séance* of the scandalmongers upon the possible relations between those two gay prodigals.

The scandalous scenes, however (save the last of them), are almost entirely without connexion with the plot. They can be detached and enjoyed separately without any sensible loss in the reader's (or even spectator's) mind. In themselves the management of all the details is inimitable. The eager interchange takes away our breath; there is no break or possibility of pause in it. The malign suggestion, the candid astonishment, the spite which assails, and the malicious good-nature which excuses, are all balanced to perfection, with a spirit which never flags for a moment. And when the veterans in the art are joined by a brilliant and mischievous recruit in the shape of Lady Teazle, rushing in amongst them in pure *gaité du cœur*, the energy of her young onslaught outdoes them all. The talk has never been so brilliant, never so pitiless, as when she joins them. She adds the gift of mimicry to all their malice, and produces a genuine laugh even from those murderers of their neighbours' reputations. This is one of the side-lights, perhaps unintentional, which keen insight throws upon human nature, showing how mere headlong imitation and high spirits, and the determination to do whatever other people do, and a little more, go further than the most mischievous intention. Perhaps the author falls into his usual fault of giving too much wit and point to the utter-

ances of the young wife, who is not intended to be clever; but her sudden dash into the midst of the dowagers, and unexpected victory over them in their own line, is full of nature. "Very well, Lady Teazle, I see you can be a little severe," says Lady Sneerwell, expressing the astonishment of the party; while Mrs. Candour hastens to welcome Sir Peter on his arrival with her habitual complaint that "they have been so censorious—and Lady Teazle as bad as any one." The slanderers themselves are taken by surprise, and the indignation and horror of the husband know no bounds. There is no more successful touch in the whole composition.

Apart from these scenes, the construction of the play shows once more Sheridan's astonishing instinct for a striking situation. Two such will immediately occur to the mind of the reader—the great screen scene, and that in which Sir Charles Surface sells his family portraits. The first is incomparably the greater of the two, and one which has rarely been equalled on the stage. The succession of interviews, one after another, has not a word too much; nor could the most impatient audience find any sameness or repetition in the successive arrivals, each one of which adds an embarrassment to the dilemma of Joseph Surface, and helps to clear up those of his victims. As the imbroglio grows before our eyes, and every door of escape for the hypocrite is shut up, without even the common sentimental error of awakening commiseration for him, the most matter-of-fact spectator can scarcely repress, even when carried along by the interest of the story, a sensation of admiring wonder at the skill with which all these combinations are effected. It is less tragic than Tartuffe, insomuch as Orgon's profound belief, and the darker guilt of the domestic traitor, move us more deeply; and it

is not terrible, like the unveiling of Iago; but neither is it trivial, as the ordinary discoveries of deceitful wives and friends to which we are accustomed on the stage so generally are; and the fine art with which Sir Peter—something of an old curmudgeon in the earlier scenes—is made unexpectedly to reveal his better nature, and thus prepare the way, unawares, for the re-establishment of his own happiness at the moment when it seems entirely shattered, is worthy of the highest praise. It would, no doubt, have been higher art could the dramatist have deceived his audience as well as the personages of the play, and made us also parties in the surprise of the discovery. But this is what no one has as yet attempted, not even Shakspeare, and we have no right to object to Sheridan that we are in the secret of Joseph's baseness all the time, just as we are in the secret of Tartuffe's, and can with difficulty understand how it is that he deceives any one. There remains for the comedy of the future (or the tragedy, which, wherever the deeper chords of life are touched, comes to very much the same thing) a still greater achievement—that of inventing an Iago who shall deceive the audience as well as the Othello upon whom he plays, and be found out only by us and our hero at the same moment. Probably, could such a thing be done, the effect would be too great, and the indignation and horror of the crowd, thus skilfully excited, produce a sensation beyond that which is permissible to fiction. But Sheridan does not deal with any tragical powers. Nothing deeper is within his reach than the momentary touch of real feeling with which Lady Teazle vindicates herself, and proves her capacity for better things. The gradual development of the situation, the unwilling agency of the deceiver in opening the eyes and touching the heart of the woman he hopes to seduce, and

clearing the character of the brother whom he desires to incriminate; the confusion of his mind as one after another so many dangerous elements come together; the chuckling malice of the old man, eager, half to exonerate Joseph from the charge of austerity, half to betray his secret, little suspecting how nearly his own credit is involved; the stupefying dismay of the disclosure—are managed with the most complete success. The scene is in itself a succinct drama, quite comprehensible even when detached from its context, and of the highest effectiveness. So far as morals are concerned, it is as harmless as any equivocal situation can be. To be sure, the suggestion of the little milliner is no more savoury than the presence of Lady Teazle is becoming to her reputation and duty; but the utter confusion of the scheme, and the admirable and unexpected turn given to the conclusion by her genuine perception of her folly and her husband's merit, go as far as is possible to neutralise all that is amiss in it. There had been a temporary doubt as to whether the *Rivals* would catch the public fancy: there was none at all about this.

The other great scene, that in which Charles Surface sells his pictures, has qualities of a different kind. It is less perfect and more suggestive than most of Sheridan's work. We have to accept the favourite type of the stage hero—the reckless, thoughtless, warm-hearted, impressionable spendthrift, as willing to give as he is averse to pay, scattering his wild oats by handfuls, wasting his life and his means in riotous living, yet easily touched and full of kind impulses—before we can do justice to it. This character, whatever moralists may say, always has, and probably always will retain a favoured place in fiction. Though we know very well that in real life dissipation does not keep

the heart soft or promote gratitude and other generous sentiments, yet we are still willing to believe that the riotous youth whose animal spirits carry him away into devious paths is at bottom better than the demure one who keeps his peccadilloes out of sight of the world. The eighteenth century had no doubt on the subject. Charles Surface is the light-hearted prodigal whose easy vices have brought him to the point of destruction. Whatever grave thoughts on the subject he may have within, he is resolute in carrying out his gay career to the end, and ready to laugh in the face of ruin. A more severe taste might consider his light-heartedness swagger and his generosity prodigality; but we are expected on the stage to consider such characteristics as far more frequently conjoined with a good heart than sobriety and decency. The reckless young reprobate, at the lowest ebb of his fortune, ready to throw away anything or everything, and exposing himself hopelessly and all his follies to the rich uncle who has come to test him, conciliates our good opinion from the beginning by the real kindness with which he protects "little Premium," the supposed money-lender, from the rude pleasantries of his boon companions. The touch of desperation which is in his gaiety without ever finding expression in words enhances the effect of his headlong talk and wild wit. When his companion, Careless, to whom it is all a good joke, complains, "Charles, I haven't a hammer; and what's an auctioneer without a hammer?" the master of the ruined house clutches, with a laugh, at the family pedigree, firmly and tightly encircling its roller, and throws that to him: "Here, Careless, you shall have no common bit of mahogany; here's the family tree for you, and you may knock down my ancestors with their own pedigree," he cries. Such a laugh raises echoes which we wonder

whether Sheridan contemplated or had any thought of. As the prodigal rattles on, with almost too much swing and "way" upon him in the tragi-comedy of fate, we are hurried along in the stream of his wild gaiety with sympathy which he has no right to. The audience is all on his side from the first word. Sir Oliver is a weak-headed old gentleman, not at all equal to Sir Peter, and is overcome with ludicrous ease and rapidity; but the obstinacy of affectionate gratitude with which the hot-headed young fellow holds by the portrait of his benefactor, and the fine superiority with which he puts all "little Premium's" overtures aside, without putting on any new-born virtue or pretensions to amendment, are in their way a masterpiece. He pretends no admiration for the distant uncle, but speaks of him as freely as of the other sacrificed ancestors. "The little ill-looking fellow over the settee" evokes no sentiment from him. He is quite willing to draw a post-obit upon Sir Oliver's life, and to jest at him as a little nabob with next to no liver. But for all that, a sort of impudent fidelity, a reckless gratitude, is in the ruined prodigal. The equally reckless but more composed friend, who is ready to abet him in all his folly with the indifference of an unconcerned bystander, the wondering contempt of the Jew, the concealed and somewhat maudlin emotion of the once indignant uncle, surround the figure of the swaggering gallant with the most felicitous background. It is far less elaborate and complicated than the companion scene, but it is scarcely less successful.

It is a curious particular in the excellence of the piece, however, and scarcely a commendation, we fear, in the point of view of art, that these very striking scenes, as well as those in which the scandalmongers hold their amusing conclave, may all be detached from the setting with the

greatest ease and without any perceptible loss of interest. Never was there a drama which it was so easy to take to pieces. The screen scene in itself forms, as we have already pointed out, a succinct and brilliant little performance which the simple audience could understand; and though the others might require a word or two of preface, they are each sufficiently perfect in themselves to admit of separation from the context. It says a great deal for the power of the writer that this should be consistent with the general interest of the comedy, and that we are scarcely conscious, in the acting, of the looseness with which it hangs together, or the independence of the different parts. Sheridan, who was not a playwright by science, but rather by accident, did not in all likelihood, in the exuberance of his strength, trouble himself with any study of the laws that regulate dramatic composition. The unities of time and place he preserves, indeed, because it suits him to do so; the incidents of his pieces might all happen in a few hours, for anything we know, and with singularly little change of scene; but the close composition and interweaving of one part with another, which all dramatists ought, but so very few do, study, evidently cost him little thought. He has the quickest eye for a situation, and knows that nothing pleases the playgoing public so much as a strong combination and climax; but he does not take the trouble to rivet the links of his chain or fit them very closely into each other. It is a wonderful tribute to his power that, notwithstanding this looseness of construction, few people object to allow to the *School for Scandal* the pre-eminence accorded to it by admiring contemporaries as being the best modern English comedy. There is more nature and more story in *She Stoops to Conquer*; but nothing so brilliant, so incisive, no such

concentration of all the forces of art, and nothing like the sparkle of the dialogue, the polish and ease of diction. Goldsmith's play, though produced only three or four years before, is a generation older in atmosphere and sentiment; but it is the only one which has proved a competitor with Sheridan's great comedy, or that we can compare with it. To go back to Shakspeare and place these brilliant studies of Society in the eighteenth century by the side of that radiant world of imagination which took refuge in the woods of Arden, or found a place in the enchanted island, would be futile indeed. It would be little less foolish than to compare Sheridan's prologues and occasional verses with the *Allegro* and the *Penseroso*. Not to that region or near it did he ever reach. It was not his to sound the depths of human thought or mount to any height of fancy. Rosalind and Prospero were out of his reckoning altogether; but for a lively observation of what was going on upon the surface of life, with an occasional step a little way—but only a little way—beyond, and a fine instinct for the concentration of incident and interest which make a striking dramatic scene, nobody has excelled him, and very few indeed reach anything like the level of his power.

This play, which the actors had begun to rehearse before it was all written, was received by everybody connected with the theatre with excitement and applause. Garrick himself, it is said, attended the rehearsals, and "was never known on any former occasion to be more anxious for a favourite piece." The old actor threw himself with generous warmth into the interest of the new dramatist, upon whom for the moment the glory of Drury Lane depended. Moore quotes a note from him which proves the active interest he took in the production of the

new play. "A gentleman who is as mad as himself about y^e *School*," he writes, "remarked that the characters upon y^e stage at y^e falling of y^e screen stand too long before they speak. I thought so too y^e first night: he said it was y^e same on y^e 2nd, and was remark'd by others: tho' they should be astonish'd and a little petrify'd, yet it may be carry'd to too great a length." His affectionate interterest is still further proved by the prologue, in which he speaks of Sheridan with a sort of paternal admiration:

"Is our young bard so young to think that he
Can stop the full spring-tide of calumny?
Knows he the world so little, and its trade?
Alas! the devil's sooner raised than laid.
So strong, so swift, the monster there's no gagging:
Cut Scandal's head off, still the tongue is wagging.
Proud of your smiles, once lavishly bestowed,
Again our young Don Quixote takes the road;
To show his gratitude he draws his pen,
And seeks the hydra, Scandal, in his den.
For your applause all perils he would through—
He'll fight—that's write—a caballero true,
Till every drop of blood—that's ink—is spilt for you."

It is a ludicrous circumstance in the history that an attempt was made after Sheridan's death, and by no less strange a hand than that of his first biographer, Watkins, to question the authorship of the *School for Scandal*, which, according to this absurd story, was the composition of an anonymous young lady, who sent it to the management of Drury Lane shortly before her death, an event of which Sheridan took advantage to produce her work as his own! That any reasonable creature could be found to give vent to such a ridiculous fiction is an evidence of human folly and malignity more remarkable

than any in the play, and laughably appropriate as connected with it—as if Sir Benjamin Backbite had risen from the grave to avenge himself.

It is needless to add that the popularity which has never failed for more than a century attended the first production of the great comedy. It brought back prosperity with a bound to the theatre, which had been struggling in vain under Sheridan's management against, so to speak, Sheridan himself at Covent Garden, in the shape of the *Rivals* and *Duenna*. Two years after its first production it is noted in the books of the theatre that "the *School for Scandal* damped the new pieces." Nothing could stand against it, and the account of the nightly receipts shows with what steadiness it continued to fill the treasury, which had been sinking to a lower and lower ebb.

Many attempts were made at the time, and have been made since, to show how and from whom Sheridan derived his ideas: a more justifiable appropriation than that of the play entire, though perhaps a still more disagreeable imputation, since many who would not give credit to the suggestion of a literary crime and wholesome robbery would not hesitate to believe the lesser accusation. Plagiarism is vile, and everywhere to be condemned; but it is an easy exercise of the critical faculty, and one in which, in all generations, some of the smaller professors of the craft find a congenial field of labour, to ferret out resemblances in imaginative compositions, which are as natural as the resemblances between members of the same race, were it not for the invidious suggestion that the one is a theft from the other. It would be nearly as reasonable to say that the family air and features of a noble house were stolen from the ancestors of the same. It is suggested accordingly that Joseph and Charles Surface

came from *Tom Jones* and *Blifil;* that Mrs. Malaprop was perhaps Mrs. Slip-slop, or perhaps a sort of hash of Miss Tabitha Bramble and her waiting-maid; and even that the amusing meetings of the *School for Scandal* were a reflection from the *Misanthrope.* There will always be some who will take a pleasure in depreciating the originality of an author in this way; but it is scarcely necessary, now that Sheridan himself has become a classic, to take any trouble in pointing out the pettiness of such criticism, so far as he is concerned. Like Molière, he took his own where he found it, with an inalienable right to do so which no reasonable and competent literary tribunal would ever deny. The process by which one idea strikes fire upon another and helps to hand the light of imagination along the line, is a natural and noble one, honourable to every mind which has to do with it, and as unlike the baseness of literary robbery or imitation as any natural growth and evolution can be. It is, indeed, one of the finest offices of the poet to awaken smouldering thoughts in other intelligences, and strike off into the darkness as many varied scintillations of kindred light as the race can produce. A curious instance of the ease with which accusations of this sort are made, as well as of how a small slander will extend and spread, is to be found, of all places in the world, in the record made by Samuel Rogers of the conversations of Charles James Fox. Sheridan, among other appropriations, had been supposed to take the idea of Sir Oliver's return from his own mother's novel of *Sidney Biddulph.* He might for that matter have taken it from a hundred novels, since no incident was more hackneyed. "Thought *Sidney Biddulph* one of the best novels of the age," Rogers reports Fox to have said. "Sheridan denied having read it, though the plot of his *School for Scandal*

was borrowed from it." Sir Peter Teazle's ball, which, after missing Charles Surface, "struck against a little bronze Shakspeare that stood over the fireplace, glanced out of the window at a right angle, and wounded the postman who was just coming to the door with a double letter from Northamptonshire," was scarcely a more successful example of the amplification of report than this. It is not to be supposed that Fox meant any harm to his friend and sometime colleague; but the expansion of the original statement, that the idea of the Indian uncle's return came from this source, to the bold assertion that the plot of the *School for Scandal* was borrowed from it, is worthy of Lady Sneerwell herself.

The play was not published in any authorised edition during Sheridan's lifetime, probably because it was more to his profit, according to theatrical regulations, that it should not be so—though Sheridan's grand statement that he had been "nineteen years endeavouring to satisfy himself with the style of the *School for Scandal*, and had not succeeded," may be taken as the reason if the reader chooses. He was sufficiently dilatory and fastidious to have made that possible. It was, however, printed in Dublin (which was the great seat of literary piracy before the Union, when it shifted farther west), from a copy which Sheridan had sent to his sister, Mrs. Lefanu, "to be disposed of for her own advantage to the manager of the Dublin theatre." Almost immediately after its production several of the scenes were "adapted" and acted in France; and it has since been printed, not only in innumerable editions in England, but translated into every European language. Nor is there, we may say, any new play, unattended by special stimulation of adventitious interest, which is still so certain of securing "a good house."

In the same year in which this masterpiece came into being, and moved by the same necessities, Sheridan produced the last of his dramatic compositions—a work which has, perhaps, occasioned more innocent amusement and cordial laughter than any other of the kind in the language, and has furnished us with more allusions and illustrations than anything else out of Shakspeare. *The Critic* is, of all Sheridan's plays, the one which has least claim to originality. Although it is no copy, nor can be accused of plagiarism, it is the climax of a series of attempts descending downwards from the Elizabethan era, when the *Knight of the Burning Pestle* was performed amid the running commentaries of the homely critics; and it could scarcely have died out of the recollection of Sheridan's audience that Fielding had over and over again made the same attempt in the previous generation. But what his predecessors had tried with different degrees of success—or failure—Sheridan accomplished triumphantly. The humours of the *Rehearsal*, still sufficiently novel to himself to retain all their whimsical originality, he alone had the power so to set upon the stage that all that is ludicrous in dramatic representation is brought before us—but with so much dramatic success that the criticism becomes only a more subtle kind of applause, and in the act of making the theatre ridiculous he makes it doubly attractive. This amusing paradox is carried out with the utmost skill and boldness. In the *School for Scandal* Sheridan had held his audience in delighted suspense in scene after scene which had merely the faintest link of connexion with the plot of his play, and did little more than interrupt its action. But in the new work he held the stage for nearly half the progress of the piece by the mere power of pointed and pungent remarks, the keen

interchanges of witty talk, the personality of three or four individuals not sufficiently developed to be considered as impersonations of character, and with nothing to do but to deliver their comments upon matters of literary interest. Rarely has a greater feat been performed on the stage. We are told that Sir Fretful Plagiary was intended for Cumberland, that Dangle meant somebody else, and that this it was that gave the chief interest to the first portion of the play. But what did the multitude care about Cumberland? Should it occur to any clever playwright of our day to produce upon the stage a caricature of one of our poets—we humbly thank Heaven, much greater personages than Cumberland—a cultivated audience for the first two or three nights might enjoy the travesty. But London, on the whole, when it had once gazed at the imitated great man, would turn away without an attempt to suppress the yawn which displayed its indifference. No popular audience anywhere would be moved by such an expedient—and only a popular audience can secure the success of a play. It was not Cumberland: it was not the theatrical enthusiast represented by Dangle. Nothing can be more evanescent than successes produced by such means. And this was a vigorous and healthy success, not an affair of the coteries. It is all the more astonishing because the play on words is somewhat elaborate, the speeches in many cases long-winded, and the subjects discussed of no general human interest. Indeed, Mr. Puff's elaborate description of puffing, when subjected to the test of reading, is, it must be confessed, a little tedious: which is, of all the sins of the stage, the most unpardonable. Supposing any young dramatist of the present day to carry such a piece to a stage manager, we can imagine the consternation with which his proposal would be received. What! take up

the time of the public with a discussion of literary squabbles, and the passion of an irate author attacked by the press!—expect the world to be amused by the presentation upon the stage even of the most caustic of *Saturday Reviewers*, the sharpest operator of the nineteenth century, although in the very act of baiting a playwright! The young experimentalist would be shown to the door with the utmost celerity. His manuscript would not even be unrolled—in all probability his theatrical friend would read him a lecture upon his utter misconception of the purposes of the stage. "My dear sir," we can imagine him saying, with that mixture of blandness and impatience with which a practical man encounters an idealist, "there cannot be a greater mistake than to suppose that the world cares for what literary persons say of each other. Your testy old gentleman might be bearable if he had a daughter to marry, or a son to disinherit; but all this noise and fury about a review! Tut! the audience would be bored to death." And so any sensible adviser would say. Yet Sir Fretful, between his two tormentors, and the cheerful bustle and assured confidence of Mr. Puff, have held their ground when hundreds of sensational dramas have drooped and died. Never was a more wonderful literary feat. The art of puffing has been carried to a perfection unsuspected by Mr. Puff, and not one person in a thousand has the most remote idea who Cumberland was; but *The Critic* is as delightful as ever, and we listen to the gentlemen talking with as much relish as our grandfathers did. Nay, the simplest-minded audience, innocent of literature, and perhaps not very sure what it all means, will still answer to the touch and laugh till they cry over the poor author's wounded vanity and the woes of Tilburina. Shakspeare, it is evident, found the machinery cumbrous, and gave up

the idea of making Sly and his mockers watch the progress of the *Taming of the Shrew*; and Beaumont and Fletcher lose our interest altogether in their long-drawn-out by play, though the first idea of it is comical in the highest degree. Nor could Fielding keep the stage with his oft repeated efforts, notwithstanding the wit and point of many of his dialogues. But Sheridan at last, after so many attempts, found out the right vein. It is evident by the essays made in his own boyhood that the subject had attracted him from a very early period. His lively satire, keen as lightning, but harmless as the flashing of the summer storm which has no thunder in it, finds out every crevice in the theatrical mail. When he has turned the author outside in, and exposed all his little weaknesses (not without a sharper touch here, for it is Mr. Puff, the inventor of the art of advertising as it was in those undeveloped days, and not any better man, who fills the place of the successful dramatist), he turns to the play itself with the same delightful perception of its absurdities. The bits of dialogue which are interposed sparkle like diamonds:

"*Sneer.* Pray, Mr. Puff, how came Sir Christopher Hatton never to ask that question before?

"*Puff.* What, before the play began? How the plague could he?

"*Dangle.* That's true, l'faith!"

And again:

"*Dangle.* Mr. Puff, as he knows all this, why does Sir Walter go on telling him?

"*Puff.* But the audience are not supposed to know anything of the matter, are they?

"*Sneer.* True; but I think you manage ill; for there certainly appears no reason why Sir Walter should be so communicative.

"*Puff.* 'Fore Gad, now, that is one of the most ungrateful obser-

vations I ever heard!—for the less inducement he has to tell all this, the more I think you ought to be obliged to him, for I'm sure you'd know nothing of the matter without it.

"*Dangle.* That's very true, upon my word."

In these interpolations every word tells; but there is no malice in the laughing champion who strikes so full in the centre of the shield, and gets such irresistible fooling out of the difficulties of his own art. It is amusing to remember—though Leigh Hunt, in his somewhat shrill and bitter sketch of Sheridan, points it out with unfriendly zeal—that the sentimental dreams which he afterwards prepared for the stage were of the very order which he here exposed to the laughter of the world. "It is observable, and not a little edifying to observe," says this critic, "that when those who excel in a spirit of satire above everything else come to attempt serious specimens of the poetry and romance whose exaggerations they ridicule, they make ridiculous mistakes of their own, and of the very same kind: *so allied is habitual want of faith with want of all higher power.* The style of the *Stranger* is poor and pick-thank enough; but *Pizarro* in its highest flights is downright booth at a fair—a tall, spouting gentleman in tinsel." The words in italics are worthy of Joseph Surface. But the more sympathetic reader will be glad to remember that *Pizarro* has passed out of the recollection of the world so completely that no one but a biographer or unfriendly critic would ever think nowadays of associating it with Sheridan's name. "Serious specimens of poetry and romance" were entirely out of his way. The most extravagant of his admirers has never claimed for him any kindred with the Shakspearian largeness which makes Lear and Touchstone members of the same vast family. That Sheridan himself, when driven to it, fell into the

lowest depths of dramatic bathos need not injure our appreciation of his delightful and light-hearted mockery and exposure of all its false effects. In *The Critic* he is at the height of his powers; his keen sense of the ridiculous might have, though we do not claim it for him, a moral aim, and be directed to the reformation of the theatre; but his first inspiration came from his own enjoyment of the humours of the stage and perception of its whimsical incongruities. No doubt, however, he was weighed down by the preposterous dramas which were submitted to him for the use of the company at Drury Lane when he broke forth into this brilliant piece of fun and mockery. It afforded a most useful lesson to the dramatical writers then abusing their prerogative and filling the stage with bathos and highflown folly; and there is no reason why we should refuse to Sheridan the credit of a good purpose, as well as of a most amusing and in no way ill-natured extravaganza, admirably true, so far as it goes, and skimming the surface of society and of some developments of human nature with an unerring hand.

Another of the many strange anecdotes told of Sheridan's dilatoriness and headlong race against time at the end is connected with the composition of *The Critic*. It is perfectly in keeping with his character, but it must not be forgotten that it was his policy to suffer such tales to be current, and even to give them a certain amount of justification. *The Critic* was announced and talked of long before its completion, nay, before it was begun—not a singular event, perhaps, in dramatic experience. It was then sent to the theatre in detached scenes, as had been the case with the *School for Scandal*. Finally a definite date was fixed for its appearance—the 30th of October; but when the 26th had arrived the work, to the despair

of everybody connected with the theatre, was still incomplete.

We quote from *Sheridaniana*, an anonymous publication, intended to make up the deficiencies of Moore's life, the following account of the amusing expedient by which the conclusion was accomplished:

"Dr. Ford and Mr. Linley, the joint proprietors, began to get nervous and uneasy, and the actors were absolutely *au désespoir*, especially King, who was not only stage-manager, but had to play Puff. To him was assigned the duty of hunting down and worrying Sheridan about the last scene. Day after day passed, until the last day but two arrived, and still it did not make its appearance. At last Mr. Linley, who, being his father-in-law, was pretty well aware of his habits, hit upon a stratagem. A night rehearsal of *The Critic* was ordered, and Sheridan, having dined with Linley, was prevailed to go. When they were on the stage King whispered to Sheridan that he had something particular to communicate, and begged he would step into the second greenroom. Accordingly Sheridan went, and found there a table, with pens, ink, and paper, a good fire, an arm-chair at the table, and two bottles of claret, with a dish of anchovy sandwiches. The moment he got into the room King stepped out and locked the door; immediately after which Linley and Ford came up and told the author that until he had written the scene he would be kept where he was. Sheridan took this decided measure in good part: he ate the anchovies, finished the claret, wrote the scene, and laughed heartily at the ingenuity of the contrivance."

We have the less compunction in quoting an anecdote, vouched for only by anonymous witnesses, that there can be little doubt it was a kind of story which Sheridan would have given no contradiction to. The dash of sudden creation making up for long neglect of duty was the conventional mode of procedure for such a man. To discuss the immorality of such a mode of action would be altogether out of place here. Every evasion of duty is

due to some sort of selfishness; but the world has always been indulgent (up to a certain point) of the indolent and vagrant character which is conjoined with a capacity for great work in an emergency, and, so long as the thing is done, and done with such brilliancy at last, will condone any irregularity in the doing of it.

The result, it is said, of *The Critic* was immediately apparent. For some time after its production the old type of tragedy became impossible, at least at Drury Lane. Dramas in which "the heroine was found to be forestalled by Tilburina" could not be any great loss to the stage; and it is amusing to realise the aspect of an audience fresh from *The Critic*, when such a tragedy was placed on the boards, while the spectators vainly struggled to shut out a recollection of the Governor opposing his honour to all the seductions of his daughter, or Whiskerandos refusing to die again on any entreaty, from their minds. It was little wonder if all the craft were furious, and the authors —whose productions were chased by laughter from the stage—could not find any abuse bitter enough for Sheridan.

There was, unfortunately, very good cause for complaint on other grounds. To speak of his habits of business as being bad would be absurd, for he had no business habits at all. His management of the theatre when it fell into his hands was as discreditable as could be. He allowed everything to go to confusion, and letters and the manuscripts submitted to him, and every application relating to the theatre, to accumulate, till even the cheques for which he sent to his treasury, and which he had a thousand uses for, were confounded in the general heap and lost to him, till some recurring incident or importunate applicant made an examination of these stores a necessity. It is some-

what difficult to make out how far and how long, or if ever, he was himself responsible for the stage-management; but all the business of the theatre went to confusion in his hands, and it would appear that at first at least the company took example by the disorderly behaviour of their head. Garrick, who had hoped so highly from the new proprietor and done so much for him, had to apologise as he could for a state of things which looked like chaos come again. "Everybody is raving against Sheridan for his supineness," cries one of Garrick's correspondents; and the unfortunate Hopkins, the prompter, whose "Amen!" upon the end of the manuscript we have described, affords us a picture of the kingdom of misrule which existed at Drury Lane which is pitiful enough:

"We played last night *Much Ado About Nothing*" [writes this martyr], "and had to make an apology for the three principal parts. About twelve o'clock Mr. Henderson sent word that he was not able to play. We got Mr. Louis, from Covent Garden, who supplied the part of Benedick. Soon after Mr. Parsons sent word he could not play. Mr. Moody supplied the part of Dogberry; and about four in the afternoon Mr. Vernon sent word he could not play. Mr. Mattock supplied his part of Balthazar. I thought myself very happy in getting these wide gaps so well stopped. In the middle of the first act a message was brought to me that Mr. Lamash, who was to play the part of Borachio, was not come to the house. I had nobody then who could go on for it, so I was obliged to cut two scenes in the first and second act entirely out, and get Mr. Wrighton to go on for the piece. At length we got the play over without the audience finding it out. We had a very bad house. Mr. Parsons is not able to play in the *School for Scandal* to-morrow night: do not know how we shall be able to settle that. I hope the pantomime may prove successful, and release us from this dreadful situation."

This was the condition into which the orderly and well-governed theatre had fallen soon after Garrick resigned

into Sheridan's younger and, as he hoped, better hands—the young Hercules who was to succeed old Atlas in carrying the weight of the great undertaking on his shoulders, his kingdom and authority. The receipts, that infallible thermometer of theatrical success, soon began to fail, and everything threatened destruction, which was averted violently by the production one after the other of Sheridan's two plays, only to fall back into wilder chaos afterwards. For some part of this time the elder Sheridan—who, after their reconciliation, had engaged with his son as one of the members of the company—was stage manager. It is pleasant to see the claims of nature thus acknowledged, and to have this practical proof that Sheridan still believed in his father's talents and capabilities; but it does not seem to have been a fortunate attempt. Thomas Sheridan is said to have been as harsh as his son was easy and disorderly. His highest effort in his profession had been made in the hope of rivalling the great actor, with whose name and fame and all the traditions of his method Drury Lane was filled. He was an elocutionist, and believed salvation to depend upon a certain measure of delivery which he had himself invented and perfected, and concerning which he was at once an enthusiast and a pedant. To introduce such a man to the little despotism of a theatre, and set him over the members of an opposite faction in his art, was, even when tempered by the mildness of Linley, a desperate expedient, and his reign did not last very long. Whether it returned to Sheridan's own shiftless hands before a more competent head was found it is difficult to make out; but at all events it was long enough under his disorderly sway to turn everything upside down. The ridiculous story referred to above about the authorship of the *School for Scandal* was sup-

ported by the complaints of authors whose manuscript dramas had never been returned to them, and to whom it was easy to say that Sheridan had stolen their best ideas and made use of them as his own. A portion of one of the first scenes in *The Critic*, which is now out of date, and which, indeed, many people may read without any real understanding of what it refers to, makes special reference to complaints and animadversions of this kind. Sir Fretful announces that he has sent his play to Covent Garden :

"*Sneer.* I should have thought, now, it would have been better cast (as the actors call it) at Drury Lane.

"*Sir Fret.* Oh lud, no! never send a play there while I live. Hark'ye [*whispers Sneer*].

"*Sneer.* Writes himself! I know he does—

"*Sir Fret.* I say nothing. I take away from no man's merit, am hurt at no man's good-fortune. I say nothing. But this I will say: through all my knowledge of life I have observed that there is not a passion so strongly rooted in the human heart as envy.

"*Sneer.* I believe you have reason for what you say, indeed.

"*Sir Fret.* Besides—I can tell you it is not always safe to leave a play in the hands of those who write themselves.

"*Sneer.* What! they may steal from them, my dear Plagiary?

"*Sir Fret.* Steal! to be sure they may; and, egad! serve your best thoughts as gipsies do stolen children, disfigure them to make them pass for their own—

"*Sneer.* But your present work is a sacrifice to Melpomene, and he, you know—

"*Sir Fret.* That's no security: a dexterous plagiarist may do anything. Why, sir, for aught I know, he might take out some of the best things in my tragedy and put them into his own comedy."

Thus it is apparent Sheridan himself was perfectly conscious of the things that were said about him. He gave no contradiction, it is said, to the absurd story about the *School for Scandal*—how should he? To such an

extraordinary accusation a contemptuous silence was the best answer. But it is with an easy good-humour, a laugh of the most cheerful mockery, that he confronts the bitter gossip which suggests the unsafeness of leaving manuscripts in his hands. He was not himself ashamed of his sins in this respect. His bag of letters all jumbled together, his table covered with papers, the suitors who waited in vain for a hearing, the business that was done by fits and starts in the interval of his other engagements —all this did not affect his conscience. Cumberland, as if to prove his identity with Sheridan's sketch, describes in a letter to Garrick the ways of the new manager; and the reader will see by this brief paragraph how like was the portrait. "I read," said the dramatist, "the tragedy in the ears of the performers on Friday morning. I was highly flattered by the audience, but your successor in the management is not a representative of your polite attention to authors on such occasions, for he came in yawning at the fifth act with no other apology than having sat up two nights running. It gave me not the slightest offence, as I put it all to the habit of dissipation and indolence; but I fear his office will suffer from want of due attention," Sir Fretful adds.

This was within a few years of Sheridan's entry upon the property and responsibility of the theatre. All that he possessed—which means all that he had by miraculous luck and by mysterious means, which no one has ever been able to fathom, scraped together—was embarked in it. It had enabled him to enter at once upon a way of living and into a sphere of society in which the son of the needy player and lecturer, the idle youth of Bath, without a profession or a penny—the rash lover who had married without the most distant prospect of being able to main-

tain his wife, yet haughtily forbidden her to exercise her profession and maintain him—could never have expected to find himself. If ever man had an inducement to devote himself to the cultivation of the extraordinary opportunities which had been thus given to him, it was he. But he had never been trained to devote himself to anything, and the prodigality of good-fortune which had fallen upon him turned his head, and made him believe, no doubt, that everything was to be as easy as the beginning. Garrick had made a great fortune from the theatre, and there was every reason to suspect that Sheridan, so easily proved the most successful dramatist of his day, might do still more. But Sheridan, alas! had none of the qualities which were requisite for this achievement; even in composition he had soon reached the length of his tether. Twice he was able to make up brilliantly by an almost momentary effort for the bad effects of his carelessness in every practical way. But it is not possible for any man to go on doing this for ever, and the limit of his powers was very soon reached. If he had kept to his own easy trade and sphere, and refrained from public life and all its absorbing cares, would he have continued periodically to re-make his own fortune and that of the theatre by a new play? Who can tell? It is always open to the spectator to believe that such might have been the case, and that Sheridan, put into harness like a few greater spirits, might have maintained an endless stream of production, as Shakspeare did. But there are indications of another kind which may lead critics to decide differently. Sheridan's view of life was not a profound one. It was but a vulgar sort of drama, a problem without any depths —to be solved by plenty of money and wine and pleasure, by youth and high spirits, and an easy lavishness which

was called liberality, or even generosity as occasion served. But to Sheridan there was nothing to find out in it, any more than there is anything to find out in the characters of his plays. He had nothing to say further. Lady Teazle's easy penitence, her husband's pardon, achieved by the elegant turn of her head seen through the open door, and the entry of Charles Surface into all the good things of this life, in recompense for an insolent sort of condescending gratitude to his egotistical old uncle, were all he knew on this great subject. And when that was said he had turned round upon the stage, the audience, the actors, and the writers who catered for them, and made fun of them all with the broadest mirth, and easy indifference to what might come after. What was there more for him to say? *The Critic*, so far as the impulse of creative energy, or what, for want of a better word, we call genius, was concerned, was Sheridan's last word.

It was during this period of lawlessness and misrule at Drury, while either Sheridan himself or his father was holding the sceptre of unreason there, that Garrick died. He had retired from the theatre only a few years before, and had watched it with anxious interest ever since, no doubt deeply disappointed by the failure of the hopes which he had founded upon the new proprietorship and the brilliant young substitute whom he had helped to put into his own place. Sheridan followed him to the grave as chief mourner—and his impressionable nature being strongly touched by the death of the man who had been so good to him, shut himself up for a day or two, and wrote a monody to Garrick's memory, which met with much applause in its day. It was seemly that some tribute should be paid to the great actor's name in the theatre of which he had for so long

been the life and soul, though Sheridan's production of his own poem at the end of the play which was then running, as an independent performance and sacrifice to the *manes* of his predecessor, was a novelty on the stage. It was partly said and partly sung, and must have been on the whole a curious interlude in its solemnity amid the bustle and animation of the evening's performance. As a poem it is not remarkable, but it is the most considerable of Sheridan's productions in that way. The most characteristic point in it is the complaint of the evanescence of an actor's fame and reputation, which was very appropriate to the moment, though perhaps too solemn for the occasion. After recording the honours paid to the poet and painter, he contrasts their lasting fame with the temporary reputation of the heroes of the stage:

"The actor only shrinks from time's award;
Feeble tradition is his mem'ry's guard;
By whose faint breath his merits must abide,
Unvouch'd by proof—to substance unallied!
E'en matchless Garrick's art to heaven resign'd,
No fix'd effect, no model leaves behind!
The grace of action, the adapted mien,
Faithful as nature to the varied scene;
The expressive glance whose subtle comment draws
Entranced attention and a mute applause;
Gesture which marks, with force and feeling fraught,
A sense in silence and a will in thought;
Harmonious speech whose pure and liquid tone
Gives verse a music scarce confess'd its own.

* * * * * *

All perishable! like th' electric fire,
But strike the frame—and as they strike expire;
Incense too pure a bodied flame to bear,
Its fragrance charms the sense and blends with air.

Where, then—while sunk in cold decay he lies,
And pale eclipse for ever seals those eyes—
Where is the blest memorial that ensures
Our Garrick's fame? Whose is the trust?—'tis yours!"

No one would grudge Garrick all the honour that could be paid him on the stage where he had been so important a figure. But that the fame of the actor should be like incense which melts in the air and dies is very natural, notwithstanding Sheridan's protest. The poetry which inspires him is not his, nor the sentiments to which he gives expression. He is but an interpreter; he has no claim of originality upon our admiration. But Garrick, if any man, has had a reputation of the permanent kind. His name is as well known as that of Pope or Samuel Johnson. His generation, and the many notable persons in it, gave him a sort of worship in his day. He was buried in Westminster Abbey, his pall borne by noble peers, thirty-four mourning coaches in all the panoply of woe following, "while the streets were lined with groups of spectators falling in with the train as it reached the Abbey." And up to this day we have not forgotten Garrick. He died in 1779, just four years after the beginning of Sheridan's connection with the theatre. The Monody came in between the *School for Scandal* and *The Critic*, the keenest satire and laughter alternating with the dirge, which, however, was only permitted for a few nights—the audience in general have something else to do than to amuse itself by weeping over the lost.

It must have been shortly after this solemn performance that the theatre found a more suitable manager in the person of King, the actor; and though Sheridan never ceased to harass and drain it, yet the business of every day began to go on in a more regular manner. His father

retired from the head of affairs, and he had, fortunately, too much to do cultivating pleasure and society to attempt this additional work—even with the assistance of his Betsey, who seems to have done him faithful service through all these early years. He was still but twenty-nine when his growing acquaintance with statesmen and interest in political affairs opened to the brilliant young man, whom everybody admired, the portals of a more important world.

CHAPTER IV.

PUBLIC LIFE.

While Sheridan was completing his brief career in literature, and bringing fortune and fame to one theatre after another by the short series of plays, each an essay of a distinct kind in dramatic composition, which we have discussed, his position had been gradually changing. It had been from the beginning, according to all rules of reason, a perfectly untenable position. When he established himself in London with his beautiful young wife they had neither means nor prospects to justify the life which they immediately began to lead, making their house, which had no feasible means of support, into a sort of little social centre, and collecting about it a crowd of acquaintances, much better off than they, out of that indefinite mass of society which is always ready to go where good talk and good music are to be had, to amuse themselves at the cost of the rash entertainers, who probably believe they are "making friends" when they expend all their best gifts upon an unscrupulous, though fashionable, mob. Nothing could be more unwarrantable than this outset upon an existence which was serious to neither of them, and in which wit and song were made the servants of a vague and shifting public which took everything and gave nothing. Society (in words) judges leniently the foolish victims who thus

immolate themselves for its pleasure, giving them credit for generosity and other liberal virtues; but it is to be feared that the excitement of high animal spirits, and the love of commotion and applause, have more to do with their folly than kindness for their fellow-creatures. The two young Sheridans had both been brought up in an atmosphere of publicity, and to both of them an admiring audience was a sort of necessity of nature. And it is so easy to believe, and far easier then than now, that to "make good friends" is to make your fortune. Sheridan was more fortunate than it is good for our moral to admit any man to be. His rashness, joined to his brilliant social qualities, seemed at first—even before dramatic fame came in to make assurance sure—likely to attain the reward for which he hoped, and to bring the world to his feet. But such success, if for the moment both brilliant and sweet, has a Nemesis from whose clutches few escape.

It is evident that there were some connections of his boyish days, Harrow schoolfellows, who had not forgotten him, or were ready enough to resume old acquaintance—and gay companions of the holiday period of Bath, among whom was no less a person than Windham—who helped him to the friendship of others still more desirable. Lord John Townshend, one of these early friends, brought him acquainted with the most intimate and distinguished of his after-associates—the leader with whom the most important part of his life was identified. It was thus that he formed the friendship of Fox:

"I made [Townshend writes] the first dinner-party at which they met, having told Fox that all the notions he might have conceived of Sheridan's talents and genius from the comedy of *The Rivals*, etc., would fall infinitely short of the admiration of his astonishing powers which I was sure he would entertain at the first interview. The

first interview between them — there were very few present, only Tickell and myself, and one or two more — I shall never forget. Fox told me after breaking up from dinner that he always thought Hare, after my uncle, Charles Townshend, the wittiest man he ever met with, but that Sheridan surpassed them both infinitely; and Sheridan told me next day that he was quite lost in admiration of Fox, and that it was a puzzle to him to say what he admired most, his commanding superiority of talent and universal knowledge, or his playful fancy, artless manners, and benevolence of heart, which showed itself in every word he uttered."

At very nearly the same time Sheridan became acquainted with Burke. Dr. Johnson himself, it is said, proposed him as a member of the Literary Club, and his friendship and connection with Garrick must have introduced him widely among the people whom it is distinction to know. "An evening at Sheridan's is worth a week's waiting for," Fox is reported to have said. The brilliant young man with his lovely wife was such a representative of genius as might have dazzled the wisest. He had already made the most brilliant beginning, and who could tell what he might live to do, with the world still before him, vigorous health and undaunted spirits, and all the charm of personal fascination to enhance those undeniable powers which must have appeared far greater then, in the glow of expectation, and lustre of all they were yet to do, than we know them now to have been? And when he stepped at once from the life, without any visible means, which he had been living, to the position of proprietor of Drury Lane, with an established occupation and the prospect of certain fortune, there seemed nothing beyond his legitimate ambition, as there was nothing beyond his luxury and hospitality, and lavish enjoyment. Social success so great and rapid is always rare, and the contrast between the former life of the poor player's penniless son, walking

the streets of Bath in idleness, without a sixpence in his pocket, and that of the distinguished young dramatist on the edge of public life, making a close alliance with two of the first statesmen of the day, invited everywhere, courted everywhere, must have been overwhelming. If his head had been turned by it, and the head of his Eliza (or his Betsey, as he calls her, with magnanimous disdain of finery), who could have been surprised? That his foundations were altogether insecure, and the whole fabric dangerous and apt to topple over like a house of cards, was not an idea which, in the excitement of early triumph, he was likely to dwell upon.

He had, as is evident from the scattered fragments which Moore has been careful to gather up, a fancy for politics and discussion of public matters at an early period, and intended to have collected and published various essays on such subjects shortly after his marriage. At least, it is supposed that the solemn announcement made to Linley of "a book" on which he had been "very seriously at work," which he was just then sending to the press, "and which I think will do me some credit, if it leads to nothing else," must have meant a collection of these papers. Nothing more was ever heard of it, so far as appears; but they were found by his biographer among the chaos of scraps and uncompleted work through which he had to wade. Among these, Moore says, "are a few political letters, evidently designed for the newspapers, some of them but half copied out, and probably never sent, . . ." and "some commencements of periodical papers under various names, *The Dictator*, *The Dramatic Censor*, etc., none of them apparently carried beyond the middle of the first number;" among which, oddly enough—a strange subject for Captain Absolute to take in hand—"is a letter to the

Queen recommending the establishment of an institution for the instruction and maintenance of young females in the better classes of life, who, from either the loss of their parents or poverty, are without the means of being brought up suitably to their station," to be founded on the model of St. Cyr, placed under the patronage of her Majesty, and entitled "The Royal Sanctuary." This fine scheme is supported by eloquence thoroughly appropriate at once to the subject in such hands, and to the age of the writer. "The dispute about the proper sphere of women is idle," he says. "That men should have attempted to draw a line for their orbit shows that God meant them for comets, and above our jurisdiction. With them the enthusiasm of poetry and idolatry of love is the simple voice of nature." . . . "How can we be better employed," the young man adds, with a lofty inspiration which puts all modern agitations on the subject to shame, "than in perfecting that which governs us? The brighter they are the more shall we be illumined. Were the minds of all women cultivated by inspiration men would become wiser, of course. They are a sort of pentagraphs with which Nature writes on the heart of man: what she delineates on the original map will appear on the copy." This fine contribution to the literature of a subject which has taken so important a place among the discussions of to-day would, perhaps, however, scarcely accord with the tone of the arguments now in use.

From this romantic question he diverged into politics proper; and, under the stimulation of London life, and his encounter with the actual warriors of the day, the tide had begun to run so strongly that Sheridan ventured an unwary stroke against the shield which Dr. Johnson had just hung up against all comers in his pamphlet on

the American question. Fortunately for himself, it did not come to anything, for he had intended, it appears, to instance Johnson's partisanship on this occasion as a proof of the effect of a pension, describing "such pamphlets" as "trifling and insincere as the venal quit-rent of a birthday ode," and stigmatising the great writer himself, the Autocrat of the past age, as "an eleemosynary politician who writes on the subject merely because he has been recommended for writing otherwise all his lifetime." Such profanity will make the reader shiver; but, fortunately, it never saw the light, and with easy levity the young dramatist turned round and paid the literary patriarch such a compliment upon the stage as perhaps the secret assault made all the warmer. This was conveyed in a prologue written by Sheridan to a play of Savage:

> "So pleads the tale that gives to future times
> The son's misfortunes and the parent's crimes;
> There shall his fame, if own'd to-night, survive,
> Fix'd by the hand that bids our language live."

Another political essay of a less personal character upon the subject of Absenteeism in Ireland also forms one of these unfinished relics. Sheridan was so little of an Irishman in fact that there is not, we think, a single trace even of a visit to his native country from the time he left it as a child, and all his personal interests and associations were in England. But his family had veered back again to the place of their birth, his brother and sisters having settled in Dublin, and no doubt a warmer interest than the common would naturally be in the mind of a man whose veins were warmed by that sunshine which somehow gets into English blood on the other side of the narrow seas. In those elementary days, when Ireland was but beginning

to find out that her woes could have a remedy, Absenteeism was the first and greatest of the evils that were supposed to oppress her, and the optimists of the period were disposed to believe that, could her landlords be persuaded to reside on their estates, all would be well. The changed ideas and extraordinary development of requirements since that simple age make it interesting to quote Sheridan's view of the situation then. He sets before us the system which we at present identify with the tactics rather of Scotch than of Irish landlords, that of sacrificing the people to sheep (since followed by deer), and substituting large sheep-farms for the smaller holdings of the crofters or cotters, with considerable force, although argument on that side of the question has gone so much further and sustained so many changes since then:

"It must ever be the interest of the absentee to place his estate in the hands of as few tenants as possible, by which means there will be less difficulty or hazard in collecting his rents and less entrusted to an agent, if the estate require one. The easiest method of effecting this is by laying out the land for pasturage, and letting it in grass to those who deal only in a 'fatal living crop,' whose produce we are not allowed a market for where manufactured, while we want art, honesty, and encouragement to fit it for home consumption. Thus the indolent extravagance of the lord becomes subservient to the interests of a few mercenary graziers—shepherds of most unpastoral principles—while the veteran husbandman may lean on the shattered, unused plough and view himself surrounded with flocks that furnish raiment without food. Or if his honesty be not proof against the hard assaults of penury, he may be led to revenge himself on those ducal innovators of his little field—then learn too late that some portion of the soil is reserved for a crop more fatal even than that which tempted and destroyed him.

"Without dwelling on the particular ill effects of non-residence in this case, I shall conclude with representing that powerful and supreme prerogative which the absentee foregoes—the prerogative

of mercy, of charity. The estated resident is invested with a kind of relieving Providence—a power to heal the wounds of undeserved misfortune, to break the blows of adverse fortune, and leave chance no power to undo the hopes of honest, persevering industry. There cannot surely be a more happy station than that wherein prosperity and worldly interest are to be best forwarded by an exertion of the most endearing offices of humanity. This is his situation who lives on the soil which furnishes him with means to live. It is his interest to watch the devastation of the storm, the ravage of the flood, to mark the pernicious extremes of the elements, and by a judicious indulgence and assistance to convert the sorrows and repinings of the sufferer into blessings on his humanity. By such a conduct he saves his people from the sin of unrighteous murmurs, and makes Heaven his debtor for their resignation."

It is strange yet not incomprehensible that the course of events should have turned this plaint and appeal to the landlords to unite themselves more closely with their tenants into the present fierce endeavour to get rid of landlords altogether. In the end of last century everybody repeated the outcry. It was the subject of Miss Edgeworth's popular stories, as well as of young Sheridan's first essay in political writing. Perhaps, had the appeal been cordially responded to in those days, there would have been a less dangerous situation, a milder demand, in our own.

These not very brilliant but sensible pages were the first serious attempts of Sheridan, so far as appears, to put together his thoughts upon a political subject. He had shown no particular inclination towards public life in his earlier days; no resort to debating clubs, like that which at a later period brought Canning under the eyes of those in power, is recorded of him. Oratory, in all probability, had been made odious to him by his father's unceasing devotion to his system, and the prominence which the art of elocu-

tion had been made to bear in his early life. And it is a little difficult to make out how it was that, just as he had achieved brilliant success in one career, he should have so abruptly turned to another, and set his heart and hopes on that in preference to every other path to distinction. No doubt a secret sense that in this great sphere there were superior triumphs to be won must have been in his mind. Nobody, so far as we are aware, has ever doubted Sheridan's honesty or the sincerity of his political opinions. At the same time it can scarcely be imagined that the acquaintance of Fox and Burke had not a large share in determining these opinions, and that other hopes and wishes, apart from the impulses of patriotism and public spirit, had not much to do in turning him towards a course of life so little indicated by anything in its beginning. There is no appearance that Sheridan cared very much for literary fame. His taste was not refined nor his mind highly cultivated; he thought, like Byron and George III., that Shakspeare was a much over-rated writer. He was very difficult to please in his own diction, and elaborated both written dialogues and spoken speeches with the most anxious care; but fame as an author was not what he looked for or cared for, nor would such a reputation have answered his purpose. Social success was what he aimed at—he wanted to be among the first, not in intellect, but in fact; to win his way into the highest elevation, and to stand there on an equality with whosoever should approach. For such a fame as this literature, unaided, can do but little. The days of patronage, in which an author was the natural hanger-on and dependent of a great man, are not so dissimilar as they appear to our own; except in so far that the patron in former days paid a more just equivalent for the distinction which his famous hanger-on might give

him. In modern times the poet who is content to swell the train of a great family and get himself into society by that means, gets a very precarious footing in the enchanted circle, and is never recognised as one of the fine people who gave him a great deal of vague praise, but nothing else. This was a sort of favour which Sheridan would never have brooked. He had made that clear from the beginning. He would not creep into favour or wait for invitations into great houses, but boldly and at once took the initiative, and himself invited the great world, and became the host and entertainer of persons infinitely more important than himself. There is no subject on which the easy morality of society has been more eloquent than on the folly of the artist and man of letters who, not content with having all houses thrown open to him, insists upon entertaining in their own persons, and providing for dukes and princes what can be but a feeble imitation, at the best, of their own lordly fare. But we think that the sympathetic reader, when he looks into it, will find many inducements to a charitable interpretation of such seeming extravagance. The artist is received everywhere; he is among, but not of, the most brilliant assemblages, perhaps even he lends them part of their attractions; but even in the very stare with which the fine ladies and fine gentlemen contemplate him he will read the certainty that he is a spectacle, a thing to be looked at—but not one of them. In his own house the balance is redressed, and he holds his fit place. Something of this feeling, perhaps, was in the largeness of hospitality with which Sir Walter Scott threw open his doors, a magnanimous yet half-disdainful generosity, as who should say, "If you will stare, come here and do it, where I am your superior as master of my house, your inferior only out of high courtesy and honour

to my guest." Sheridan was not like Scott, but he was a proud man. And it pleased his sense of humour that the Duchess of Devonshire, still balancing in her mind whether she should receive these young people, should be his guest instead, and have the grace extended to her, instead of first extending it to him. And no doubt his determination to acquire for himself, if by any possibility he could, a position in which he should be on the same level as the greatest—not admitted on sufferance, but an indispensable part of society—had something to do with the earnestness with which he threw himself into public life. The origin of a great statesman is unimportant. Power is a dazzling cloak which covers every imperfection, whereas fame of other kinds but emphasizes and points them out.

This is by no means to say that Sheridan had no higher meaning in his political life. He was very faithful to his party and to Fox, and later to the less respectable patron with whom his name is associated, with little reward of any kind. But he was not an enthusiast, like Burke, any more than a philosopher, nor was his patriotism or his character worthy to be named along with those of that noble and unfortunate politician, with whom for one period of their lives Sheridan was brought into a sort of rivalship. Burke was at all times a leading and originating spirit, penetrating the surface of things; Sheridan a light-hearted adventurer in politics as well as in life, with keen perceptions and a brilliant way of now and then hitting out a right suggestion, and finding often a fine and effective thing to say. It is impossible, however, to think of him as influencing public opinion in any great or lasting way. He acted on the great stage of public life, on a large scale, the part of the Horatios—nay, let us say the

Mercutios of the theatre—sometimes by stress of circumstances coming to the front with a noble piece of rhetoric or even of pure poetry to deliver once in a way, always giving a brilliancy of fine costume and dazzle and glitter on the second level. If the motives which led him to that greatest of arenas were not solely the ardours of patriotism, they were not the meaner stimulants of self-interest. He had no thought of making his fortune out of his country; if he hoped to get advancement by her, and honour, and a place among the highest, these desires were at least not mercenary, and might with very little difficulty be translated into that which is still considered a lofty weakness—that which Milton calls the last infirmity of noble minds—a desire for fame. It is easy to make this pursuit look very fine and dazzling: it may be mean enough, on the other hand.

It was in 1780, when he was twenty-nine, that Sheridan entered Parliament. It was his pride that he was not brought in for any pocket borough, but was elected by the town of Stafford, in which the freemen of the burgh had the privilege of choosing their member. How they exercised that choice—agreeably, no doubt, to themselves, and very much so to the candidate, whose path was thus extraordinarily simplified—may be seen in the account of Sheridan's election expenses, where there is one such broad and simple entry as the following: "248 *Burgesses, paid £5 5s. each.*" A petition against his return and that of his colleague was not unnaturally presented, but came to nothing, and Sheridan's first speech was made in his own defence. It was not a very successful one. The House, attracted by his reputation in other scenes, and by the name, which by this time was so well known in society, heard him "with particular attention;" but he, whose

future appearances were to carry with them the enthusiastic applauses of the most difficult audience in England, had to submit to the force of ridicule, which he himself so often and so brilliantly applied in after times, and to that still more appalling ordeal, the chill attention and disappointment of his hearers. He is said to have rushed up to the reporters' gallery, where Woodfall was busy with his notes, and to have asked his opinion. "I am sorry to say I do not think this is your line," said that candid friend; "you had much better have stuck to your former pursuits." On hearing which Sheridan rested his head on his hands for a few minutes, and then vehemently exclaimed, "It is in me, however, and, by G—, it shall come out!" The quiver of disappointment, excitement, and determination in this outcry is very characteristic. It did come out, and that at no very great interval, as everybody knows.

Sheridan entered political life at a time when it was full of commotion and conflict. The American war was in full progress, kept up by the obstinacy of the King and the subserviency of his Ministers against almost all the better feeling of England, and in face of a steadily increasing opposition, which extended from statesmen like Burke and Fox down to the other extremity of society—to the Surrey peasant who was William Cobbett's father, and who "would not have suffered his best friend to drink success to the King's arms." Politics were exceptionally keen and bitter, since they were in a great measure a personal conflict between a small number of men pitted against each other—men of the same training, position, and traditions, but split into two hereditary factions, and contending fiercely for the mastery—while the nation had little more to do with it than to stand at a

distance vaguely looking on, with no power of action, and even an imperfect knowledge of the proceedings of Parliament, which was supposed to represent and certainly did rule them. That the public had any right at all to a knowledge of what was going on in the debates of the two Houses, was but a recent idea, and still the reports were to the highest degree meagre and unsatisfactory; while the expression of public feeling through the newspapers was still in a very early stage. But within the narrow circle which held power, and which also held the potential criticism which is the soul of party in England, the differences of opinion were heightened by personal emulations, and violent oppositions existed between men of whom we find a difficulty in discovering now why it was that they did not work continuously side by side, instead of, with spasmodic changes, in separate parties. There were points, especially in respect to the representation of the people, in which Pitt was more liberal than Fox; and the Whigs, thenceforward to be associated with every project of electoral reform, were conservative to the highest degree in this respect, and defended their close boroughs with all the zeal of proprietorship. In 1780, when Sheridan entered Parliament, the King took an active part in every act of the Government, with an obedient Minister under his orders, and a Parliament filled with dependents and pensioners. No appeal to the country was possible in those days, or even thought of. No appeal, indeed, was possible anywhere. It was the final battle-ground, where every combatant had his antagonist, and the air was always loud with cries of battle. The Whig party had it very much at heart to reduce the power of the Court, and clear out the accumulated corruptions which stifled wholesome life in the House of Commons; but they

had no very strong desire to widen the franchise or admit the mass of the people to political privileges. Sheridan, indeed, had taken part along with Fox during that very year in a Reform meeting which had passed certain "Resolutions on the state of the representation," advocating the right of the people to universal suffrage and annual parliaments; but it is scarcely possible to believe that their share in it was more than a pleasantry. "Always say that you are for annual parliaments and universal suffrage, then you are safe," Fox is reported to have said, with, no doubt, a twinkle in his eye; while Burke made merry over the still more advanced opinions of some visionary politicians, "who—founding on the latter words of a statute of Edward III. that a parliament should be holden every year once, and more often if need be—were known by the denomination of Oftener-if-need-bes." "For my part," he would add, "I am an Oftener-if-need-be." Thus the statesmen jested at their ease, very sure that nothing would come of it, and not unwilling to amuse themselves with schemes so extravagant.

Among the leaders of the party with which Sheridan threw in his fortunes, a very high, perhaps the highest, place was held by Burke, who was in some respects like himself, a man of humble origin, with none of the dignified antecedents possessed by the others, though with a genius superior to them all, and the highest oratorical powers: the countryman, perhaps the model, perhaps the rival, of the new recruit with whom he had so many external points of likeness. It is curious to find two such men, both Irishmen, both in the higher sense of the word adventurers, with the same command of eloquence, at the head of a great English political party at the same moment. There does not seem ever to have been the

same cordiality of friendship between them, notwithstanding, or perhaps in consequence of, the similarity of their circumstances, as existed between each of them and the genial and gracious Fox, whose lovableness and sweetness of nature seem to have vanquished every heart, and kept an atmosphere of pleasantness about him, which breathes through every page in which he is named. To have come at once into the close companionship of such men as these, to be permitted to share their counsels, to add his word to theirs, to unite with them in all their undertakings, and, dearest joy of all, to fight by their side in every parliamentary tumult, and defy the Tories and the Fates along with them, was an elevation which might well have turned the head of the young dramatist, who had so little right to expect any such astonishing advancement.

And the firmament all around this keen and eager centre was gloomy and threatening—in America the war advancing to that stage in which continuance becomes an impossibility, and a climax of one kind or another must be arrived at—in Ireland, which in those days was the Ireland of the Protestant ascendency, the reverse of everything that calls itself Irish now, a sort of chronic semi-rebellion—in India, where the Company were making their conquests and forming their government in independence of any direct imperial control, a hundred questions arising which would have to be settled ere long—in France, the gathering of the Revolutionary storm, which was soon to burst and affect all the world. A more exciting outlook could not be. The existing generation did not perhaps realise the crowding in of troubles from every side as we do, to whom the whole panorama is rolled out; while naturally there were matters which we take very

calmly, as knowing them to have passed quite innocuously over the great vitality of England, which to them looked dangers unspeakable. But we need not attempt to enter here into that detailed narrative of the political life of the period which would be necessary did we trace Sheridan through every debate he took part in, and every political movement in which he was engaged. This has been recently done in a former volume of this series with a completeness and care which would render a repeated effort of the same character a superfluity, even were the writer bold enough to venture upon such a competition. The political surroundings and events of Burke's public life were to a great extent those of Sheridan also, and it would be almost an impertinence to retrace the ground which Mr. Morley has gone over so thoroughly. We will therefore confine ourselves to an indication of the chief movements in which Sheridan was personally involved, and in which his impetuous eloquence produced an effect which has made his name historical. This result was not immediately attained; but it is evident that the leaders of the party must have very soon perceived how valuable a recruit the young member for Stafford was, since he was carried with them into office after little more than two years of parliamentary life, in the short accession to power of the Whig party after the fall of Lord North. What he had done to merit this speedy elevation it is difficult to see. He was made one of the under-secretaries of state in the Rockingham Ministry, and had to all appearance the ball at his foot. The feeling entertained on this subject by his family, watching from across the Channel with much agitation of hope the extraordinary and unaccountable advance he was making, is admirably set forth in the following letter from his brother:

"I am much obliged to you for your early intelligence concerning the fate of the Ministry, and give you joy on the occasion, notwithstanding your sorrow for the departure of the good Opposition. I understand very well what you mean by this sorrow; but as you may be now in a situation in which you may obtain some substantial advantage to yourself, for God's sake improve the opportunity to the utmost, and don't let dreams of empty fame (of which you have had enough in conscience) carry you away from your solid interests. I return you many thanks for Fox's letter—I mean for your intention to make him write one—for as your good intentions always satisfy your conscience, and that you seem to think the carrying of them into execution to be a mere trifling ceremony, as well omitted as not, your friends must always take the will for the deed. I will forgive you, however, on condition that you will for once in your life consider that though the will alone may perfectly satisfy yourself, your friends would be a little more gratified if they were sometimes to see it accompanied by the deed—and let me be the first upon whom you try the experiment. If the people here are not to share the fate of their patrons, but are suffered to continue in the government of this country, I believe you will have it in your power, as I am certain it will be in your inclination, to fortify my claims upon them, by recommendation from your side of the water, in such a manner as to insure to me what I have a right to expect from them, but of which I can have no certainty without that assistance. I wish the present people may continue here, because I certainly have claims upon them; and considering the footing that Lord C—— and Charles Fox are on, a recommendation from the latter would now have every weight; it would be drawing a bill upon Government here, payable at sight, which they dare not protest. So, dear Dick, I shall rely upon you that this will *really* be done; and, to confess the truth, unless it be done, and speedily, I shall be completely ruined."

The delightful *naïveté* of this letter, and its half-provoked tone of good advice and superior wisdom, throws a humorous gleam over the situation. That it was Sheridan's bounden duty "for God's sake" to take care that no foolish ideas should prevent him from securing substantial advantage to himself, and in the meantime and

at once an appointment for his brother, is too far beyond question to be discussed; but the writer cannot but feel an impatient conviction that Dick is quite capable of neglecting both for some flummery about fame, which is really almost too much to be put up with. Charles Sheridan got his appointment, which was that of Secretary of War in Ireland, a post which he enjoyed for many years. But the "substantial advantage" which he considered it his brother's duty to secure for himself never came.

Sheridan's first taste of the sweets of office was a very short one. The Rockingham Ministry remained in but four months, during which time they succeeded in clearing away a considerable portion of the accumulated uncleanness which had recently neutralised the power of the House of Commons. The measures passed in this brief period dealt a fatal blow at that overwhelming influence of the Crown which had brought about so many disasters, and, by a stern cutting off of the means of corruption, "mark the date when the direct bribery of members absolutely ceased," which is the highest praise. But Lord Rockingham died, and Lord Shelburne succeeded him, who represented but one side of the party, and the withdrawal of Fox from the Ministry brought Sheridan back—it is said partly against his own judgment, which says all the more for his fidelity to his leader—into the irresponsibility and unprofitableness of opposition. The famous Coalition, which came into being a year later, restored him to office as Secretary of the Treasury. Sheridan went on forming his style as a political speaker with great care and perseverance through all these vicissitudes. At first he is said to have written his speeches out carefully, and even learnt them by heart, "using for this purpose," Moore tells us, "the same sort of copy-books

which he had employed in the first rough draughts of his plays." Afterwards a scribble on a piece of paper was enough to guide him, and sometimes it is very evident he made a telling retort or a bold attack without preparation at all. One of these, preserved in the collection of his speeches, has a vivid gleam of restrained excitement and personal feeling in it which gives it an interest more human than political. It occurred in the discussion by the House of the preliminaries of the treaty afterwards known as the Treaty of Versailles, in which the independence of America was formally recognized. In Sheridan's speech on the subject he had referred pointedly to Pitt, who had become Chancellor of the Exchequer in Lord Shelburne's Administration, and who had objected to something in a previous debate as inconsistent with the established usage of the House. "This convinced him," Sheridan said, "that the right honourable gentleman was more a practical politician than an experienced one," and that "his years and his very early political exaltation had not permitted him to look whether there had been precedents, or to acquire a knowledge of the journals of the House." Pitt resented this assault upon his youth as every young man is apt to do, and did his best to turn the war into the enemy's camp. Here is the somewhat ungenerous assault he made —one, however, which has been repeated almost as often as there have been eminent literary men in public life:

"No man admired more than he did the abilities of that right honourable gentleman, the elegant sallies of his thought, the gay effusions of his fancy, his dramatic turns, and his epigrammatic points; and if they were reserved for a proper stage, they would no doubt receive what the honourable gentleman's abilities always did receive, the plaudits of the audience; and it would be his fortune '*sin plausu gaudere theatri.*' But this was not the proper scene for the exhibi-

tion of these elegancies; and he therefore must beg leave to call the attention of the House to the serious consideration of the very important questions now before them."

This unhandsome reference to Sheridan's theatrical fame was one of those uncalled for and unworthy attacks which give the person assailed an enormous advantage over the assailant; and Sheridan was quite equal to the occasion:

"Mr. Sheridan then rose to an explanation, which being made, he took notice of that particular sort of personality which the right honourable gentleman had thought proper to introduce. He need not comment upon it—the propriety, the taste, the gentlemanly point of it, must have been obvious to the House. But, said Mr. Sheridan, let me assure the right honourable gentleman that I do now, and will at any time when he chooses to repeat this sort of allusion, meet it with the most sincere good-humour. Nay, I will say more: flattered and encouraged by the right honourable gentleman's panegyric on my talents, if I ever again engage in the compositions he alludes to, I may be tempted to an act of presumption—to attempt an improvement on one of Ben Jonson's best characters—the character of the Angry Boy, in the *Alchymist*."[1]

Apart from sparrings of this description, however, in which his light hand and touch were always effective, Sheridan gradually proceeded to take a larger part in the business of the House, his speeches being full of energy, lucidity, and point, as well as of unfailing humour. But it was not till the celebrated impeachment of Warren Hastings, one of the most dramatic episodes in parliamentary history, that he rose to the fulness of his eloquence and power. The story of that episode has been often told: almost more often and more fully than any

[1] This threat was carried out by the issue of a pretended play bill, in which not only was the part of the Angry Boy allotted to Pitt, but the audacious wit proceeded to assign that of Surly to "His ——"!

other chapter of modern history; and everybody knows how and why it was that—having added to the wealth of his chiefs and the power of the nation, and with a consciousness in his mind of having done much to open up and confirm an immense new empire to his country—this Indian ruler and lawgiver, astonished, found himself confronted by the indignation of all that was best and greatest in England, and ere he knew was placed at the bar to account for what he had done, the treasures he had exacted, and the oppressions with which he had crushed the native states and their rulers.

> "Is India free? and does she wear her plumed
> And jewelled turban with a smile of peace?
> Or do we grind her still?"

Cowper had said, as he opened his scanty newspaper in the fireside quiet at Olney, some time before. The manner in which such a prize was added to the British crown has slipped from the general memory nowadays, and we are apt to forget how many deeds were done on that argument that would not bear the light of public inquiry. But this great trial will always stand as a proof that the time had arrived in the history of England when she would no longer tolerate the high-handed proceedings of the conqueror, and that even national aggrandisement was not a strong enough inducement to make her overlook injustice and cruelty, though in the ends of the earth.

It was Burke who originated the idea of impeachment for Warren Hastings: it was Pitt, by his unexpected vote with the accusing party, who made it practicable; but Sheridan was the hero of the occasion. One of the worst charges against Hastings was his conduct to the princesses of Oude, the old and helpless Begums whom he

imprisoned and ill-used in order to draw from them their treasures; and this moving subject, the one of all others best adapted for him, it was given to Sheridan to set forth in all the atrocity of its circumstances, and with all the power of eloquent indignation of which he was master, before the House, as one of the grounds for the impeachment. The speech was ill reported, and has not been preserved in a form which does it justice, but we have such details of its effect as have rarely been laid up in history. The following account, corroborated by many witnesses, is taken from the summary given at the head of the extracts from this oration in the collection of Sheridan's speeches:

"For five hours and a half Mr. Sheridan commanded the universal interest and admiration of the House (which, from the expectation of the day, was uncommonly crowded) by an oration of almost unexampled excellence, uniting the most convincing closeness and accuracy of argument with the most luminous precision and perspicuity of language, and alternately giving form and energy to truth by solid and substantial reasoning; and enlightening the most extensive and involved subjects with the purest clearness of logic and the brightest splendours of rhetoric. Every prejudice, every prepossession, was gradually overcome by the force of this extraordinary combination of keen but liberal discrimination, of brilliant yet argumentative wit. So fascinated were the auditors by his eloquence, that when Mr. Sheridan sat down the whole House—the members, peers, and strangers—involuntarily joined in a tumult of applause, and adopted a mode of expressing their admiration, new and irregular in the House, by loudly and repeatedly clapping with their hands. Mr. Burke declared it to be the most astonishing effort of eloquence, argument, and wit united of which there was any record or tradition. Mr. Fox said, 'All that he had ever heard—all that he had ever read—when compared with it dwindled into nothing, and vanished like vapour before the sun.' Mr. Pitt acknowledged that it surpassed all the eloquence of ancient or of modern times, and possessed everything that genius or art could furnish to agitate and control the hu-

man mind. The effects it produced were proportioned to its merits. After a considerable suspension of the debate, one of the friends of Mr. Hastings—Mr. Burgess—with some difficulty obtained for a short time a hearing; but, finding the House too strongly affected by what they had heard to listen to him with favour, sat down again. Several members confessed they had come down strongly prepossessed in favour of the person accused, and imagined nothing less than a miracle could have wrought so entire a revolution in their sentiments. Others declared that though they could not resist the conviction that flashed upon their minds, yet they wished to have leave to cool before they were called upon to vote; and though they were persuaded it would require another miracle to produce another change in their opinions, yet for the sake of decorum they thought it proper that the debate should be adjourned. Mr. Fox and Mr. A. Taylor strongly opposed this proposition, contending that it was not less absurd than unparliamentary to defer coming to a vote for no other reason than had been alleged, than because members were too firmly convinced; but Mr. Pitt concurring with the opinions of the former, the debate was adjourned."

What Pitt said was, that they were all still "under the wand of the enchanter;" while other members individually made similar acknowledgments. "Sir William Dalton immediately moved an adjournment, confessing that in the state of mind in which Mr. Sheridan's speech had left him it was impossible for him to give a determinate opinion." That great audience, the most difficult, the most important in Christendom, was overwhelmed like a company of sympathetic women by the quick communicating thrill of intellectual excitement, of generous ardour, of wonder, terror, pity. It was like a fine intoxication which nobody could resist. Here is another amusing instance of the influence it exercised:

"The late Mr. Logan . . . author of a most masterly defence of Mr. Hastings, went that day to the House of Commons prepossessed for the accused, and against the accuser. At the expiration of the first

hour he said to a friend, 'All this is declamatory assertion without proof;' when the second was finished, 'This is a most wonderful oration.' At the close of the third, 'Mr. Hastings has acted most unjustifiably;' the fourth, 'Mr. Hastings is a most atrocious criminal;' and at last, 'Of all monsters of iniquity, the most enormous is Warren Hastings!'"

It was no wonder if the astonished members, with a feeling that this transformation was a kind of magic, unaccountable by any ordinary rule, were afraid of themselves, and dared not venture on any practical step until they had cooled down a little. It is the most remarkable instance on record in modern times of the amazing power of oratory. The public interest had flagged in the matter, notwithstanding the vehement addresses of Burke, but it awoke with a leap of excitement at this magic touch; and when, some months later, the trial took place, according to an old and long-disused formula, in Westminster Hall, the whole world flocked to listen. Macaulay has painted the scene for us in one of his most picturesque pages. The noble hall full of noble people; the peers in their ermine; the judges in their red robes; the grey old walls hung with scarlet; the wonderful audience in the galleries; the Queen herself, with all her ladies, among them the lively, weary, little frizzled head with so much in it, of Fanny Burney, prejudiced yet impressionable, looking over her Majesty's shoulder; and such faces as those of the lovely Duchess of Devonshire, the haughty beauty of Mrs. Fitzherbert, the half-angelic sweetness of Sheridan's wife, with many another less known to fame, and all the men whose names confer a glory on their age. "In the midst of the blaze of red draperies an open space had been fitted up with green benches and tables for the Commons." The great commoners who conducted the prosecution, the man-

agers of the impeachment, as they were called, appeared in full dress, even Fox, the negligent, "paying the illustrious tribunal the compliment of wearing a bag and sword." Amidst these public prosecutors the two kindred forms of Burke and Sheridan, both with a certain bluntness of feature which indicated their race, the latter at least, with those brilliant eyes which are so often the mark of genius, were the principal figures.

This wonderful scene lasted for months; and it may be supposed what an exciting entertainment was thus provided for society, ever anxious for a new sensation. Burke spoke for four days, and with great effect. But it was when it came to the turn of Sheridan to repeat his wonderful effort, and once more plead the cause of the robbed and insulted princesses, that public excitement rose to its height. "The curiosity of the public to hear him was unbounded. His sparkling and highly finished declamation lasted two days; but the hall was crowded to suffocation the whole time. It was said that fifty guineas had been paid for a single ticket." His speech, as a matter of fact, extended over four days, and the trial, which had begun in February, had lasted out till June, dragging its slow length along, when it came to this climax. Many of his colleagues considered this speech greatly inferior to the first outburst of eloquence on the same subject with which he had electrified the House of Commons. "Sheridan's speech on the Begums in the House admirable; in Westminster Hall contemptible," Lord Granville said, and such was also the opinion of Fox. But a greater than either was of a different opinion. In the sitting of the House held on the 6th of June, after an exciting morning spent in Westminster Hall, a certain Mr. Burgess, the same pertinacious person who had risen to speak in favour of Hast-

ings, while still St. Stephens was resounding with applause and inarticulate with emotion on the day of Sheridan's first speech, got up once more, while all minds were again occupied by the same subject, to call the attention of the House to some small matter of finance. He was transfixed immediately by the spear of Burke. "He could not avoid offering his warmest congratulations to the honourable gentleman on his having chosen that glorious day, after the triumph of the morning, to bring forward a business of such an important nature," cried the great orator with contemptuous sarcasm; and he went on to applaud the powerful mind of the stolid partisan who had proved himself capable of such an effort, "after every other member had been struck dumb with astonishment and admiration at the wonderful eloquence of his friend, Mr. Sheridan, who had that day again surprised the thousands who hung with rapture on his accents, by such a display of talents as was unparalleled in the annals of oratory, and so did the highest honour to himself, to that House, and to the country."

The reader will be perhaps more interested, in this deluge of applause, to hear how the wife—of whom perhaps Sheridan was not worthy, yet who was not herself without blame, a susceptible creature, with a fine nature always showing under the levities and excitements that circumstances had made natural to her—exulted in his triumph:

"I have delayed writing [the letter is to her sister-in-law] till I could gratify myself and you by sending you the news of our dear Dick's triumph—of our triumph, I may call it—for surely no one in the slightest degree connected with him but must feel proud and happy. It is impossible, my dear woman, to convey to you the delight, the astonishment, the adoration, he has excited in the breasts

of every class of people. Every party prejudice has been overcome by a display of genius, eloquence, and goodness, which no one with anything like a heart about them could have listened to without being the wiser and the better all the rest of their lives. What must *my* feelings be, you only can imagine. To tell you the truth, it is with some difficulty that I can 'let down my mind,' as Mr. Burke said afterwards, to talk or think on that or any other subject. But pleasure too exquisite becomes pain, and I am at this moment suffering from the delightful anxieties of last week."

This triumph, however, like Sheridan's previous successes, would seem to have been won by a fit of accidental exertion; for it was still as difficult as ever to keep him in harness and secure his attention. A letter quoted in Moore's life from Burke to Mrs. Sheridan makes the difficulty very apparent. The great statesman begins by skilful praise of Sheridan's abilities to propitiate his wife; and then implores Mrs. Sheridan's aid in "prevailing upon Mr. Sheridan to be with us this day at half after three in the Committee." The paymaster of Oude was to be examined, he adds, with anxious emphasis: "Oude is Mr. Sheridan's particular province; and I do most seriously ask that he would favour us with his assistance." This proves how little he was to be relied upon, even now, in the very moment of triumph. Yet on the very next page we read of the elaborate manner in which his speech was prepared, and of the exertions of his domestic helpers in arranging and classifying his materials; and he seems from Moore's account to have laboured indefatigably to acquire the necessary knowledge:

"There is a large pamphlet of Mr. Hastings," Moore tells us, "consisting of more than two hundred pages, copied out mostly in her (Mrs. Sheridan's) writing, with some assistance from another female hand. The industry, indeed, of all about him was called into requisition for the great occasion: some busy with the pen and scis-

sors making extracts, some pasting and stitching his scattered memorandums in their places, so that there was scarcely a member of his family that could not boast of having contributed his share to the mechanical construction of this speech. The pride of its success was, of course, equally participated; and Edwards, a favorite servant of Mr. Sheridan, was long celebrated for his professed imitation of the manner in which his master delivered (what seems to have struck Edwards as the finest part of the speech) his closing words, 'My Lords, I have done.'"

Macaulay informs us that Sheridan "contrived, with a knowledge of stage effect which his father might have envied, to sink back as if exhausted into the arms of Burke, who hugged him with the energy of generous admiration," when the speech was done.

In every way this was the highest point of Sheridan's career. Engaged in the greatest work to which civilised man can turn his best faculties, the government of his country, either potentially or by criticism, censure, and the restraining power of opposition, he had made his way without previous training, or any adventitious circumstances in his favour, to the very front rank of statesmen. When wrong was to be chastised and right established he was one of the foremost in the work. His party did nothing without him; his irregular ways, the difficulty which there was even in getting him to attend a meeting, were all overlooked. Rather would the Whig leaders invent, like the proprietors of the theatre in former days, a snare in which to take him, or plead with his wife for her assistance, than do without Sheridan. This was what the player's son, the dramatist and stage manager, who was nobody without education, without fortune, had come to. He was thirty-seven when he stood upon this apex of applause and honour—*al mezzo di cammin di nostra vita.* Had he died then, the wonder of his fame and greatness

would have been lessened by no painful drawback. If he were extravagant, reckless, given to the easier vices, so were other men of his generation — and pecuniary embarrassment only becomes appalling when it reaches the stage of actual want, and when squalor and misery follow in its train. We linger upon the picture of these triumphs—triumphs as legitimate, as noble, and worthy as ever man won—in which, if perhaps there was no such enthusiasm of generous sentiment as moved Burke, there was at least the sincere movement of a more volatile nature against cruelty and injustice. It does not in reality enhance the greatness of a mental effort that it is made in the cause of humanity, but it enormously increases its weight and influence with mankind. And it was an extraordinary piece of good-fortune for Sheridan, in a career made up hitherto of happy hits and splendid pieces of luck, that he should happily have lighted upon a subject for his greatest effort, which should not only afford scope for all his gifts, his impulsive generosity and tender-heartedness, as well, we may add, as that tendency to clap-trap and inflated diction which is almost always successful with the multitude — but at the same time should secure for himself as the magnanimous advocate a large share in that sympathy of the audience for the helpless and injured, which his eloquence raised into temporary passion. His subject, his oratorical power, the real enthusiasm which inspired him, even if that enthusiasm took fire at its own flame, and was more on account of Brinsley Sheridan than of the Begums, all helped in the magical effect. Even poor Mrs. Sheridan, who knew better than any one wherein the orator was defective, exulted in his triumph as "a display of genius, and eloquence, *and goodness.*" He was the champion of humanity, the de-

fender of the weak and helpless. No doubt, in the glow of interest in his own subject to which he had worked himself up, he felt all this more fervently even than his audience, which again added infinitely to his power.

The trial came to nothing, as everybody knows. It lingered over years of tedious discussion, and through worlds of wearisome verbiage, and only got decided in 1795, when the accused, whose sins by this time had been half forgotten, whose foolish plans for himself were altogether out of mind, and whose good qualities had come round again to the recollection of the world, was acquitted. By that time the breaking up of the party which had brought him to the bar, so touchingly described by Macaulay, had come to pass; and though Sheridan still held by Fox, Burke had fallen apart from them both for ever. Professor Smyth, in his valuable little *Memoir of Sheridan*, gives a description of the orator's preparation for the postscriptal speech which he had to deliver six years after, in 1794, in answer to the pleas of Hastings's counsel, which is very characteristic. Sheridan arrived suddenly one evening at the country residence where his son Tom was staying with Smyth, the tutor—with his chaise full of papers—and announced his intention of getting through them all, and being ready with his reply the day after to-morrow. "The day after to-morrow! this day six months you mean," cried Smyth, in consternation. Altogether Sheridan would seem to have taken five or six days to this trying work, recalling the recollection of his highest triumph, and refreshing his memory as to the facts, after a long and sad interval, filled with many misfortunes and downfalls. He never stirred "out of his room for three days and evenings, and each of the three nights, till the motes, he told me, were coming into his eyes, though the strongest and finest that ever

man was blest with," Smyth informs us. He dined every day with the tutor and Tom, the bright and delightful boy who was a sweeter and more innocent reproduction of himself; and during these meals Smyth found that it was his part to listen, "making a slight occasional comment on what he told me he had been doing":

"On the morning appointed he went off early in a chaise-and-four to Grosvenor Street, and none of us, Tom told me, were to come near him till the speech was over. When he came into the manager's box he was in full dress, and his countenance had assumed an ashen colour that I had never before observed. No doubt Cicero himself must have quailed before so immense and magnificent an audience as was now assembled to hear him. He was evidently tried to the utmost, every nerve and faculty within him put into complete requisition."

No doubt Sheridan felt the ghost of his own glory rising up as a rival to him in this renewed and so changed appearance. The tutor felt that "his aspect was that of a perfect orator, and thought he was listening to some being of a totally different nature from himself;" but this postscriptal harangue has had no record of fame. And already the leaf was turned over, the dark side of life come upward, and Sheridan's glory on the wane.

CHAPTER V.

MIDDLE AGE.

The middle of life is the testing ground of character and strength. There are many who hold a foremost place in the heat of youth, but sink behind when that first energy is played out; and there are many whose follies happily die, and whose true strength is only known when serious existence with its weights and responsibilities comes upon them. Many are the revelations of this sober age. Sins which were but venial in the boy grow fatal in the man. The easy indolence, the careless good-fellowship, the rollicking humour which we laugh at while we condemn them in youth, become coarser, vulgarer, meaner in maturity, and acquire a character of selfishness and brutality which was not theirs in the time of hope. In Sheridan's age, above all others, the sins of a Charles Surface were easily pardoned to a young man. He was better liked for being something of a rake; his prodigality and neglect of all prudent precautions, his rashness in every enterprise, his headlong career, which it was always believed something might turn up to guide into a better development at the end, were proofs of the generosity and truth of a character concealing nothing. All this was natural at five-and-twenty. But at thirty-five, and still more at forty, the world gets weary of Charles Surface. His light-

heartedness becomes want of feeling—his rashness unmanly folly—his shortcomings are everywhere judged by a different standard; and the middle-aged man, whom neither regard for his honour, his duty, nor his family can curb and restrain, who takes his own way, whoever suffers, and is continually playing at the highest stakes for mere life, is deserted by public opinion, and can be defended by his friends with only faltering excuses. Sheridan had been such a man in his youth. He had dared everything, and won much from fate. Without a penny to begin with, or any of that capital of industry, perseverance, and determination which serves instead of money, he got possession of and enjoyed all the luxuries of wealth. He did more than this: he became one of the leading names in England, foremost on imperial occasions, and known wherever news of England was prized or read; and through all his earlier years the world had laughed at his shifts, his hair-breadth escapes, the careless prodigality of nature, which made it certain that by a sudden and violent effort at the end he could always make up for all deficiencies. It was a jest that

> "Of wit, of taste, of fancy, we'll debate,
> If Sheridan for once be not too late."

And in the artificial world of the theatre the recklessness of the man and all his eccentricities had something in them which suited that abode of strong contrasts and effects. But after a course of years the world began to get tired of always waiting for Sheridan, always finding that he had forgotten his word and his appointments, and never read, much less answered, his letters. There came a moment when everybody with one accord ceased and even refused to be amused by these eccentricities any longer,

and found them to be stale jests, insolences, and characterised by a selfish disregard of everybody's comfort but his own.

This natural protest no doubt was accompanied by a gradual development of all that was most insupportable in Sheridan's nature. The entire absence in him of the faculty of self control grew with his advancing years; but it was not till Providence had interposed and deprived him of the wife who, in her sweet imperfection, had yet done much for him, that any serious change happened in his fortunes. He lost his father in 1788, very shortly after his great triumph. There is no very evident sign that Thomas Sheridan ever changed his mind in respect to his sons, or ceased to prefer the prim and prudent Charles, who had bidden his brother not to be so foolishly moved by thoughts of fame as to neglect the substantial advantages which office might ensure to him. But it was Richard who attended upon the old man's death bed, moved with an almost excessive filial devotion and regret, and buried him, and intended to place a fine inscription over him, written by no hand but that of Dr. Parr, the best of scholars. It was never done; but Charles Sheridan (who was present, however, neither at the sick-bed nor the grave) had already intimated the conviction of the family that in Dick's case the will had to be taken for the deed. This loss, however, was little to the greater blow which he suffered a few years later. Mrs. Sheridan is one of those characters who, without doing anything to make themselves remarkable, yet leave a certain fragrance behind them as of something fine, and tender, and delicate. The reader will remember the letter referred to in the first chapter, in which she recounts her early troubles to her sympathising friend, a pretty and sentimental composition,

with a touch of Evelina (who was the young lady's contemporary) in its confidences, and still more of Lydia Languish, whose prototype she might well have been. And there is a certain reflection of Lydia Languish throughout her life, softened by the cessation of sentimental dilemmas, but never without a turn for the romantic. That she was a good wife to Sheridan there seems little doubt: the accounts of the theatre kept in her handwriting, the long and careful extracts made and information prepared by her to help him—even the appeals to her on every side, from her father, anxious about the theatre and its business, up to Mr. Burke, in the larger political sphere, all confident that she would be able to do what nobody else could do, keep Sheridan to an appointment—show what her office was between him and the world. Within doors, of all characters for the reckless wit to enact, he was the Falkland of his own drama, maddening a more hapless Julia, driving her a hundred times out of patience and out of heart with innumerable suspicions, jealousies, harassments of every kind. And no man who lived the life he was living, with the most riotous company of the time, could be a very good husband. He left her to go into society alone, in all her beauty and charm—the St. Cecilia of many worshippers—still elegant, lovely, and sentimental, an involuntary siren, accustomed to homage, and perhaps liking it a little, as most people, even the wisest, do. There could be no want of tenderness to her husband in the woman who wrote the letter of happy pride and adoration quoted in the last chapter; and yet she was not herself untouched by scandal, and it was whispered that a young, handsome, romantic Irishman, in all the glory of national enthusiasm, and with the shadow of tragedy already upon him, had moved her heart. It is

not necessary to enter into any such vague and shadowy tale. No permanent alienation appears to have ever arisen between her and her husband, though there were many painful scenes, consequent upon the too finely-strung nerves, which is often another name for irritability and impatience, of both. Sheridan's sister, who lived in his house for a short time after her father's death, gives us a most charming picture of this sweet and attractive woman:

"I have been here almost a week in perfect quiet. While there was company in the house I stayed in my room, and since my brother's leaving us for Margate I have sat at times with Mrs. Sheridan, who is kind and considerate, so that I have entire liberty. Her poor sister's children are all with her. The girl gives her constant employment, and seems to profit by being under so good an instructor. Their father was here for some days, but I did not see him. Last night Mrs. S. showed me a picture of Mrs. Tickell, which she wears round her neck. . . . Dick is still in town, and we do not expect him for some time. Mrs. Sheridan seems now quite reconciled to those little absences which she knows are unavoidable. I never saw any one so constant in employing every moment of her time, and to that I attribute, in a great measure, the recovery of her health and spirits. The education of her niece, her music, books, and work occupy every moment of the day. After dinner the children, who call her mamma-aunt, spend some time with us, and her manner to them is truly delightful."

Mrs. Tickell was Mrs. Sheridan's younger sister, and died just a year before her. In the mean time she had taken immediate charge of Tickell's motherless children, and the pretty "copy of verses" which she dedicated to her sister's memory embellishes and throws light upon her own:

"The hours, the days pass on; sweet spring returns,
And whispers comfort to the heart that mourns;

But not to mine, whose dear and cherished grief
Asks for indulgence, but ne'er hopes relief.
For, oh! can changing seasons e'er restore
The loved companion I must still deplore?
Shall all the wisdom of the world combined
Erase thy image, Mary, from my mind,
Or bid me hope from others to receive
The fond affection thou alone could'st give?
Ah no! my best belov'd, thou still shalt be
My friend, my sister, all the world to me.

* * * * * * *

Oh! if the soul released from mortal cares
Views the sad scene, the voice of mourning hears,
Then, dearest saint, did'st thou thy heaven forego,
Lingering on earth, in pity to our woe;
'Twas thy kind influence soothed our minds to peace,
And bade our vain and selfish murmurs cease.
'Twas thy soft smile that gave the worshipped clay
Of thy bright essence one celestial ray,
Making e'en death so beautiful that we,
Gazing on it, forgot our misery.
Then—pleasing thought!—ere to the realms of light
Thy franchised spirit took its happy flight,
With fond regard perhaps thou saw'st me bend
O'er the cold relics of my heart's best friend;
And heard'st me swear, while her dear hand I prest,
And tears of agony bedew'd my breast,
For her loved sake to act the mother's part,
And take her darling infants to my heart,
With tenderest care their youthful minds improve,
And guard her treasure with protecting love.
Once more look down, bless'd creature, and behold
These arms the precious innocents enfold.
Assist my erring nature to fulfil
The sacred trust and ward off every ill;
And oh! let *her* who is my dearest care
Thy bless'd regard and heavenly influence share.
Teach me to form her pure and artless mind
Like thine, as true, as innocent, as kind,

That when some future day my hopes shall bless,
And every voice her virtue shall express,
When my fond heart delighted hears her praise,
As with unconscious loveliness she strays,
Such, let me say, with tears of joy the while,
Such was the softness of my Mary's smile;
Such was *her* youth, so blithe, so rosy-sweet,
And such *her* mind, unpractised in deceit;
With artless eloquence, unstudied grace,
Thus did she gain in every heart a place.
Then, while the dear remembrance I behold,
Time shall steal on, nor tell me I am old,
Till nature wearied, each fond duty o'er,
I join my angel friend to part no more!"

There is something extremely sweet and touching in these lines, with their faded elegance, their pretty sentiment, the touch of the rococo in them which has now recovered popular favour, something between poetry and embroidery, and the most tender feminine feeling. All sorts of pretty things were said of this gentle woman in her day. Jackson of Exeter, the musician, who had some professional engagements with her father, and accompanied her often in her songs, said that "to see her, as she stood singing beside him at the pianoforte, was like looking into the face of an angel." Another still higher authority, the Bishop of Norwich, described her as "the connecting link between woman and angel." To Wilkes, the coarse and wild yet woman-loving demagogue, she was "the most modest flower he had ever seen." Sir Joshua painted her as St. Cecilia, and this was the flattering name by which she was known. Her letters, with a good deal of haste, and the faintest note of flippancy in them, are pretty too, full of news and society, and the card-tables at which she lost her money, and the children in whom

her real heart was centred. The romantic girl had grown into a woman, not lofty or great, but sweet and clever, and silly and generous—a fascinating creature. Moore describes, with a comical, high-flown incongruity which reminds us of Mr. Micawber, her various qualities, the intellect which could appreciate the talents of her husband, the feminine sensibility that could passionately feel his success. "Mrs. Sheridan may well take her place beside these Roman wives," he says; "not only did Calpurnia sympathise with the glory of her husband abroad, but she could also, like Mrs. Sheridan, *add a charm to his talents at home, by setting his verses to music and singing* them to her harp." Poor Siren! she had her triumphs, but she had her troubles also, many and sore. In Professor Smyth's little book there is an account of a scene which, though it happened after her death, throws some light upon one side of her troubled existence. Smyth had been engaged as tutor to Tom after his mother's death, and this was one of the interferences which he had to submit to. Sheridan had been paying a hurried visit to the house at Wanstead in which Tom and his tutor lived:

"It was a severe frost, and had been long, when he came one evening to dine, after his usual manner, on a boiled chicken, at 7, 8, or 9 o'clock, just as it happened, and had hardly drunk his claret, and got the room filled with wax lights, without which he could not exist, when he sent for me; and, lo and behold! the business was that he was miserable on account of Tom's being on the ice, that he would certainly be drowned, etc., and that he begged it of me as the greatest favour I could do him in some way or other to prevent it. I expostulated with him—that I skated myself—that I had a servant with a rope and ladder at the bank—that the ice would now bear a wagon, etc., etc.; and at last, seeing me grow half angry at his unreasonableness, he acquiesced in what I said, and calling his carriage, as he must be at Drury Lane that night, he said (it was then eleven,

and he was nine miles off), he withdrew. In about half an hour afterwards, as I was going to bed, I heard a violent ringing at the gate; I was wanted; and sure enough what should I see, glaring through the bars, and outshining the lamps of the carriage, but the fine eyes of Sheridan. 'Now, do not laugh at me, Smyth,' he said, 'but I cannot rest or think of anything but this d—d ice and this skating, and you must promise me there shall be no more of it.' I said what may be supposed; and in short was at last obliged to thrust my hand through the bars, which he shook violently, in token that his wishes should be obeyed. 'Never was such a nonsensical person as this father of yours,' said I to Tom. There was no difficulty in coming to a common vote on that point; and so, after spending nearly an hour abusing him, half laughing and half crying, for I was as fond of skating as my pupil could be, lamenting our unhappy fate, we went to bed. We sent up various petitions and remonstrances while the frost lasted, but all in vain. 'Have a glass case constructed for your son at once,' said Mr. Grey to him—an observation which Tom used to quote to me with particular approbation and delight. I talked over the subject of Mr. Sheridan and his idle nervousness with Mrs. Canning, who lived at the end of the village. She told me that nothing could be done—that he would tease and irritate Mrs. Sheridan in this manner till she was ready to dash her head against the wall, being of the same temperament of genius as her husband; that she had seen her burst into tears and leave the room; then the scene changed, and the wall seemed full as likely to receive his head in turn. The folly, however, Mrs. Canning said, was not merely once and away, but was too often repeated; and Mrs. Canning used sometimes, as she told me, to be not a little thankful that she was herself of a more ordinary clay, and that the gods, as in the case of Audrey, had not made her poetical."

This perhaps is the least comprehensible part of Sheridan's character. The combination of this self-tormentor, endowed with a faculty for extracting annoyance and trouble out of every new turn in his circumstances, and persecuting those who were dearest to him by his caprices, with the reckless and careless man of pleasure, is curious, and difficult to realise.

Mrs. Sheridan died in 1792. She had been taken to Bristol, in hopes that the change of air would do her good. But her time had come, and there was no hope for her. Her husband attended her with all the tenderness and anxiety which a man, no doubt remorseful, always impressionable, and ready to be moved by the sight, which was intolerable to him, of suffering, might be supposed to feel, watching over her with the profoundest devotion. "He cannot bear to think her in danger," writes a sympathetic friend, "or that any one else should; though he is as attentive and watchful as if he expected every moment to be her last. It is impossible for any man to behave with greater tenderness or to feel more on such an occasion." He was at her bedside night and day, "and never left her one moment that could be avoided." The crisis was one in which, with his readiness of emotion and quick and sure response to all that touched him, he was sure to appear well. Moore found, among the mass of documents through which he had to pick his way, a scrap of paper evidently belonging to this period, which gives strange expression to that realistic and materialistic horror of death as death, which was one of the features of the time: "The loss of the breath from a beloved object long suffering in pain and certainty to die is not so great a privation as the last loss of her beautiful remains, if they remain so. The victory of the grave is sharper than the sting of death." There is something in this sentiment which makes us shudder. That crowning pang of separation—

> "Our lives have fallen so far apart,
> We cannot hear each other speak"—

does not strike this mourner. The contact of the body and decay, the loss of "the beautiful remains," is what

moves him. It is like a child's primitive horror of the black box and the deep hole. In his own dying hour an awe unspeakable stole over his face when he was informed that a clergyman had been sent for. These were things to be held at arm's-length; when he was compulsorily brought in contact with them the terror was almost greater than the anguish.

The Linley family had suffered terribly in these years, one following another to the grave. There is a most touching description of the father given by the actress Mrs. Crouch which goes direct to the heart:

"After Miss Marion Linley died it was melancholy for her to sing to Mr. Linley, whose tears continually fell on the keys as he accompanied her; and if in the course of her profession she was obliged to practise a song which he had been accustomed to hear his lost daughter sing, the similarity of their manner and voices, which he had once remarked with pleasure, then affected him to such a degree that he was frequently forced to quit his instrument and walk about the room to recover his composure."

After his wife's death Sheridan's life assumed another phase. He had no longer the anchor, such as it was, which steadied him—not even the tug of remorse to bring him home to a house where there was now no one waiting for him. We are indebted to Professor Smyth's narrative for a very graphic description of this portion of Sheridan's life. In the very formation of their connection the peculiarities of his future employer were at once made known to him. It was appointed that he should meet Sheridan at dinner in town, to conclude the arrangement about the tutorship, and to keep this appointment he came up specially from the country. The dinner-hour was seven, but at nine Smyth and the friend who was to introduce him ate their cold meal without Sheridan, who then sent to say

that he had been detained at the House, but would sup with them at midnight at the St. Alban's Tavern, whither they resorted, with precisely the same result. Next day, however, the meeting did take place, and the ruffled soul of the young scholar, who had been extremely indignant to find himself thus treated, was soothed in a few minutes by the engaging manner and delightful speech of his patron. It was at Isleworth, Sheridan's country house, that they met, where very lately Madame de Genlis, that interesting and sentimental refugee, with her lovely daughter, Pamela, the beautiful young creature whom Mrs. Sheridan had bidden Lord Edward Fitzgerald to marry when she died, had paid him a visit. The house was dirty and desolate, the young observer thought, but the master of it the most captivating of men. His brilliant and expressive eyes, a certain modesty in his manner, for which the young Don was not prepared, struck Smyth above all; and he in his turn pleased the nervous and troubled father, who would have kept young Tom in a glass case had he dared. Afterwards another house was taken in Wanstead, in order that Sheridan's baby daughter might be placed under the charge of Mrs. Canning, the lady who had nursed Mrs. Sheridan and loved her, and who lived in this village; and here the boy and his tutor were sent. But a very short time after another blow fell upon Sheridan in the person of this child, whom Professor Smyth describes as the loveliest child he ever saw—an exceptional creature, whom Sheridan made a little goddess of, worshipping her with every baby rite that could be thought of. One night the house had awoke to unwonted merriment; a large childish party filled the rooms, and dancing was going on merrily, when Mrs. Canning suddenly flung open the door, crying out, "The child—the child is dying!"

Sheridan's grief was intense and overwhelming; it was piteous to hear his moans during the terrible night that followed. His warm-hearted, emotional being, horrified and panic-stricken by the approach of death, was once more altogether overwhelmed. The cruel climax of blow after blow crushed him to the earth.

During this time his parliamentary life was going on, with interruptions, sometimes brightening into flashes of his pristine brilliancy. But at this moment there were other troubles, besides those of his home and heart, to make his attendance irregular and withdraw his thoughts from public affairs. How the theatre had been going on all this time it is difficult to make out. We are told of endless embarrassments, difficulties, and trouble, of a treasury emptied wantonly, and actors left without their pay—of pieces which failed, and audiences which diminished. But, on the other hand, we are informed that the prosperity of Drury Lane never was greater than during this period, while the old theatre lasted; and, as it was the only source from which Sheridan drew his income, it is very evident that, notwithstanding all irregularities, broken promises, crowds of duns, and general mismanagement, there was an unfailing fountain of money to be drawn upon. The whole story is confused. We are sometimes told that he was himself the manager, and it is certain that now and then he stooped even so far as to arrange a pantomime; while at the same time we find the theatre under the management of King at one time, of Kemble at another—men much better qualified than Sheridan. The mere fact, indeed, that the Kemble family was at that time on the boards of Drury Lane would seem a sufficient proof of the success of the theatre; but the continually recurring discovery that the proprietor's pressing necessities had

cleared the treasury altogether was little likely to keep the troupe together or inspire its efforts. When any influential member of the company became unmanageable on this score Sheridan's persuasive talent was called in to make all right. Once, we are told, Mrs. Siddons, who had declared that she would not act until her salary was paid, who had resisted successively the eloquent appeals of her colleagues and the despair of the manager, and was calmly sewing at home after the curtain had risen for the piece in which she was expected to perform, yielded helplessly when Sheridan himself, all suave and irresistible, came on the scene, and suffered herself to be driven to the theatre like a lamb. On another occasion it was Kemble that rebelled. We are tempted to quote, for its extremely ludicrous character, this droll little scene. Sheridan had come in accidentally to join the party in the greenroom after the performance, and, taking his seat at the table, made, as usual, a cheerful beginning of conversation. Kemble, however, would make no reply:

"The great actor now looked unutterable things, and occasionally emitted a humming sound like that of a bee, and groaned in spirit inwardly. A considerable time elapsed, and frequent repetitions of the sound, when at length, like a pillar of state, up rose Kemble, and in these words addressed the astonished proprietor: 'I am an EAGLE, whose wings have been bound down by frosts and snows, but now I shake my pinions and cleave into the genial air into which I was born!' He then deliberately resumed his seat, as if he had relieved himself from unsupportable thraldom."

Undaunted by this solemn address, Sheridan drew his chair closer, and at the end of the prolonged sitting left the place—not too steadily, it is to be feared—arm-in-arm with the exasperated eagle, whom he had made as mild as any mouse. He did many feats of the same kind.

Once, the bankers having sternly resisted all blandishments of manager, treasurer, all the staff of the theatre, Sheridan went in gaily to the charge, and returned in a few minutes, beaming and successful, with the money they wanted. When he chose nobody could stand against him.

Poor Mr. Smyth had a terrible life of it with this disorderly patron. His letters were neglected, his appointments broken, his salary left unpaid. Once his pupil Tom was sent for in hot haste to meet his father at a certain roadside inn, and there waited for days if not weeks in vain expectation of his errant parent, leaving the unfortunate preceptor a prey to all kinds of anxiety. Another time the long-suffering Smyth was left at Bognor, with an old servant, Martha, without money or occupation, waiting for a summons to London which never came; and, unable at last to live any longer on credit, after letters innumerable of entreaty, protestation, and wrath, went up to London, full of fury, determined to endure no more; but was met by Sheridan with such cordial pleasure, surprise that he had not come sooner, and satisfaction with his appearance now—since Tom was getting into all sorts of mischief—that the angry tutor was entirely vanquished, and remorseful when he thought of the furious letter he had sent to this kind friend. What followed is worth quoting:

"'I wrote you a letter lately,' I said; 'it was an angry one. You will be so good as to think no more of it.' 'Oh, certainly not, my dear Smyth,' he said; 'I shall never think of what you have said in it, be assured;' and, putting his hand in his pocket, 'Here it is,' he said, offering it to me. I was glad enough to get hold of it; but looking at it as I was about to throw it into the fire, lo and behold, I saw that it had never been opened!"

Such exasperating yet ludicrous incidents were now commonplaces of Sheridan's life. "Intercourse with him," says Professor Smyth, in a harsher mood, moved by some sting of bitter recollection, "was one eternal insult, mortification, and disappointment." There was a bag on his table into which all letters were stuffed indiscriminately, and in which, when it was turned out, an astonished applicant for debt or favour might see a succession of his own letters as he sent them, with not one seal broken; but, to lessen the mortification, would find also letters enclosing money sent in answer to Sheridan's own urgent applications, turned out in the same condition, having been stuffed with the rest into that hopeless waste heap. When Professor Smyth appealed to Sheridan's old servant to know if nothing could be done to remedy this, Edwards told him a piteous story of how he had found Mr. Sheridan's window, which rattled, wedged up with bank-notes, which the muddled reveller, returning late at night, had stuffed into the gaping sash out of his pocket. The story altogether is laughable and pitiful, a tragic comedy of the most woful fooling. He had no longer youth enough to warrant an easy laugh; his reputation was going from him. He was harassed by endless creditors and duns, not able to stir out of his house without encountering two or three waiting to waylay him. The first of these, if he caught Sheridan at a moment when his pocket had just been replenished, would get the amount of his bill in full, whatever the others might have to say. The stories are endless which deal with these embarrassments, and the shifts and devices of the struggling man were endless also. They are very ridiculous to hear of; but how humiliating, miserable, and sickening to the heart and mind all these repetitions must have been! And then, to make everything worse, the

poor old theatre fell to pieces, and the taste of the day demanded a costly and luxurious new building, according to improved fashions. The money to do this was raised by the manufacture of new shares, in which there was no difficulty—but which naturally restricted the after profits of the original proprietors. And, what was still more serious, the interval occupied in the rebuilding—during which time their profits may be said to have ceased altogether—and the excess of the cost over the estimate, made an enormous difference to men who had no reserve to fall back upon. The company in the meantime played in a small theatre, at great expense, and Sheridan, profuse and lavish, unable to retrench, not wise enough even to attempt retrenchment, got deeper and deeper into debt and embarrassment.

Besides all these misadventures a new and malign influence now got possession of him. He had been presented to the young Prince of Wales, at a time when that illustrious personage was still little more than a boy, and full, it was believed, of promise and hopefulness, and had gradually grown to be one of the most intimate *habitués* of his society, a devoted retainer, adviser, and defender, holding by him in all circumstances, and sharing the irregularities of his life, and the horse-play of his amusements. The *Octogenarian*, from whose rather foolish book we have occasionally quoted, gives a tissue of absurd stories, professedly heard from Sheridan's own lips, in which the adventures of a night are recorded, and the heir-apparent is represented to us, in company with two statesmen, as all but locked up for the night at a police-station. Whether this was true or not, it is certain that the glamour which there is in the rank of a royal personage, that dazzlement which so few can resist, fell upon Sheridan. His action

as the adviser and representative in Parliament of this unillustrious Prince was dignified and sensible; but the orgies of Carlton House were, unfortunately, too much in Sheridan's way to be restrained or discountenanced by him, and so much hope and possibility as remained in his life were lost in the vulgar dissipations of this depraved secondary court, and in the poor vanity of becoming boon companion and buffoon to that first gentleman in Europe, whose florid and padded comeliness was the admiration of his day. It was a poor end for the great dramatist, who has kept thousands of his countryfolk in genial, not uninnocent amusement for the last century, and for the great orator whose eloquence had disturbed the judgment of the most august of legislative assemblies, and shaken even the convictions of the hottest partisans; but it was an end to which he had been for some time tending, and which, perhaps, the loss of his wife had made one way or other inevitable.

In the mean time several events occurred which may fill up this division of the life of the man, as apart from that of the politician and orator. In 1794 the new theatre was finished, and Sheridan sketched out for the opening a sort of extravaganza called *The Glorious First of June*, which was apparently in celebration of the naval victory of Lord Howe. The dialogue was not his, but merely the construction and arrangement, and, in emulation of Tilbury and the feats of Mr. Puff, a grand sea-fight, with finale of a lovers' meeting to the triumphant sounds of "Rule, Britannia," was introduced. The two pasteboard fleets rehearsed their manœuvres under the eye of the Duke of Clarence, and it is to be supposed that the spectacle had a triumphant success. A year or two later a less agreeable incident occurred in the history of Drury Lane. Either

deceived by the many who were ready to stake their credit upon the authenticity of the Ireland forgeries—then given forth as a discovery of precious relics of Shakspeare, including among them a completed and unpublished play—or deceived in his own person on the subject, one on which he was not learned, Sheridan accepted for the theatre this play, called *Vortigern*, and produced it with much pomp and magnificence. The audience was a crowded and critical one; and the public mind was so strongly roused by the question that, no doubt, there was some factious feeling in the prompt and unmistakable rejection of the false Shakspeare, to which Kemble by his careless acting is said to have contributed. He had never believed in the discovery, and might be irritated that the decision had been made without consulting him. Dr. Parr, however, for whom Sheridan had a great respect, and with whom he kept up friendly relations all his life, was one of those who had headed the blunder, receiving the forgeries reverentially as pure Shakspeare; and it was natural enough that Sheridan's judgment should have been influenced by a man whom he must have felt a much better authority on the question than himself. For he was no student of Shakspeare, and his prevailing recklessness was more than enough to counterbalance the keen critical instinct which produced *The Critic*. In all likelihood he never investigated the question at all, but calculated on a temporary theatrical success, without other results. "Sheridan was never known to offer his opinion on the matter until after its representation on the stage: he left the public to decide on its merits," says one of his biographers; but the incident is not an agreeable one.

It was less his fault than that of his public, perhaps, that the stage, shortly after recovering from the salutary

influence of *The Critic*, dropped again into bathos and the false heroic. "Kotzebue and German sausages are the order of the day," Sheridan himself is reported to have said when, with a shrug of his shoulders, he produced the *Stranger*, that culmination of the sentimental commonplace. Everybody will remember Thackeray's delightful banter of this wonderful production, which has, however, situations so skilfully prepared and opportunities so great for a clever actress, that it has continued to find a place in the repertory of most theatres, and is still to be heard of as the show-piece of a wandering company, as well as now and then on the most ambitious boards, its dubious moral and un-English *dénouement* notwithstanding. With Mrs. Siddons as Mrs. Haller, it may be imagined that the real pathos involved in the story would have full expression.

The success of the *Stranger* impelled Sheridan to another adaptation of a similar kind, in the tragedy of *Pizarro*, which he altered and decorated so much, it is said, as to make it almost his own. The bombast and clap-trap of this production make us regret to associate it with his name; but here also the dramatic construction was good enough, and the situations so striking as to rivet the attention of the audience, while the high-flown magnificence of the sentiments was such as always delights the multitude. When something was said to Pitt, between whom and Sheridan a gradually increasing enmity had grown, about the new drama, the Minister answered, "If you mean what Sheridan wrote, there is nothing new in it. I have heard it all long ago in his speeches on Hastings's trial." It is undeniable that there is a good deal of truth in this, and that Rolla's grand patriotic tirade—which used to be in all school reading-books, as a lesson in elocution—bears a

strong resemblance to many passages in Sheridan's speeches. All this helped its popularity. Grand addresses in favour of patriotism are always delightful to the galleries, and have at all times a charm for the general imagination; but in those days, when there was actual fighting going on, and France, who had constituted herself the pedagogue of the world, to teach the nations the alphabet of freedom, was supposed to threaten and endanger England with her fiery teaching, it may be supposed to what a height of enthusiasm these exhortations would raise the audience. "They follow an adventurer whom they fear, and obey a power which they hate; we revere a monarch whom we love, a God whom we adore. They boast they come but to improve our state, enlarge our thoughts, and free us from the yoke of error! Yes! they will give enlightened freedom to our minds, who are themselves the slaves of passion, avarice, and pride!" Whether it were under Robespierre or Bonaparte, the common people in England scorned and feared the heated neighbour-nation, which thought itself entitled to dictate to the world; and no doubt the popular mind made a rapid adaptation of these heroic phrases.

It had been hard to move the author to complete *The Critic;* and the reader will remember the trick of Linley and his coadjutors in those early days when the delays and evasions of the gay young man were an excellent jest, and their certainty of being able to put all right when they could lock him in with his work had something triumphant in it. But all that was over now; old Linley was dead, and a new generation, who had no worship for Sheridan, and a very clear apprehension of the everlasting confusion produced by his disorderly ways, had taken the place of the light-hearted actors of old. But

notwithstanding the awe-inspiring presence of Mrs. Siddons, and the importance of her brother, the astounding fact that when the curtain fell upon the fourth act of *Pizarro* these theatrical potentates had not yet seen their parts for the fifth, which they had to study in the interval, is vouched for by various witnesses. It is hard to imagine the state of the actors' minds, the terrible anxiety of the manager, in such an extraordinary dilemma, and still more hard to realise the hopeless confusion in the mind of the man who knew all that was being risked by such a piece of folly, and yet could not nerve himself to the work till the last moment. He was drifting on the rapids by this time, and going headlong to ruin, heedless of everything, name and fame, credit and fortune, the good opinion of his friends, the support of the public, all except the indulgence of the whim of the moment, or of the habit which was leading him to destruction.

He took another step about the same time which might perhaps have redeemed him had it been more wisely set about. He had met one evening, so the story goes, among other more important, and let us hope more well-bred people, a foolish, pretty girl, who, either out of flippant dislike to his looks, or that very transparent *agacerie* by which foolish men are sometimes attracted in the lower ranks of life, regarded him with exclamations of "Fright! horrid creature!" and the like, something in the style, not of Evelina, but of Miss Burney's vulgar personages. He was by this time forty-four, but ready enough still to take up any such challenge, and either he was piqued into making so frank a critic change her opinions, or the prettiness and foolishness of the girl amused and pleased him. He set to work at once to make her aware that a man of middle-age and unhandsome aspect may yet outdo the youngest

ıost attractive, and no very great time elapsed before
ıs completely successful. The lady's father was little
ed with the match. He was a clergyman, the Dean
Vinchester, and might well have been indisposed to
his daughter and her five thousand pounds to a man
such a reputation. He made his consent conditional
e settling of fifteen thousand pounds, in addition to
own little fortune, upon her. Sheridan had always
great in financial surprises, and, to the astonishment
e dean, the fifteen thousand was soon forthcoming.
ot it this time by new shares of the theatre, thus
ishing his receipts always a little and a little more.
all estate, Polesden, in Surrey, was bought with the
y, and for a time all was gaiety and pleasure. It
n order to tell him of this marriage that Sheridan
for his son, from his tutor and his lessons, on the
ion already referred to, to meet him at Guildford, at
n of which he had forgotten the name. Four or five
after the anxious tutor received a letter from Tom.
father I have never seen," wrote the lad, "and all
I can hear of him is that instead of dining with me
Vednesday last, he passed through Guildford on his
to town, with four horses and lamps, about twelve."
father like son, the youth had remained there, though
only a few shillings in his pockets; but at the end
"bored and wearied out" that he would have been
to return even to his books. Finally, he was sent for
ondon and informed of the mystery. His letter to
h disclosing this is so characteristic that it is worth
ng:

is not I that am to be married, nor you. Set your heart at
it is my father himself; the lady a Miss Ogle, who lives at
ester; and that is the history of the Guildford business.

About my own age—better me to marry her, you will say. I am not of that opinion. My father talked to me two hours last night, and made out to me that it was the most sensible thing he could do. Was not this very clever of him? Well, my dear Mr. S., you should have been tutor to him, you see. I am incomparably the most rational of the two."

Moore describes the immediate result of the new marriage as a renewal of Sheridan's youth. "It is said by those who were in habits of intimacy with him at this period that they had seldom seen his spirits in a state of more buoyant vivacity," and there was perhaps a possibility that the new event might have proved a turning-point. It is unfair to blame the foolish girl, who had no idea what the dangers were which she had so rashly undertaken to deal with, that she did not reclaim or deliver Sheridan. To do this was beyond her power, as it was beyond his own.

CHAPTER VI.

DECADENCE.

SHERIDAN'S parliamentary career was long, and he took an important part in much of the business of the country; but he never again struck the same high note as that with which he electrified the House on the question of the impeachment of Warren Hastings. His speech in answer to Lord Mornington's denunciation of the Revolution in France, perhaps his next most important effort, was eloquent and striking, but it had not the glow and glitter of the great oration under which the Commons of England held their breath. The French Revolution by this time had ceased to be the popular and splendid outburst of freedom which it had at first appeared. Opinions were now violently divided. The recent atrocities in France had scared England; and all the moving subjects which had inspired Sheridan before, the pictures of innocence outraged and the defenceless slaughtered, were now in the hands of his political opponents. He selected skilfully, however, the points which he could most effectively turn against them, and seizing upon Lord Mornington's description of the sacrifices by which French patriotism was compelled to prove itself, the compulsory loans and services, the privations and poverty amid which the leaders of the Revolution were struggling, drew an effective picture of

the very different state of affairs in England, which throws a curious light upon the political condition of the time. Sheridan's party had suffered many losses and defections. A peer in those days or a wealthy landed gentleman had need to be enlightened and strong-minded indeed, if not almost fanatical in opinion, to continue cordially on the side of those who were confiscating and murdering his equals on the other side of the Channel, and who had made the very order to which he belonged an offence against the state. The Whig nobility were no more stoical or heroic than other men, and the publication of Burke's *Reflections* and his impassioned testimony against the uncontrollable tendencies of the Revolution had moved them profoundly even before the course of events proved his prophecies true. To make the conversion of these important adherents more easy, Pitt, on the other hand, held out his arms to them, and, as the fashion of the time was, posts and sinecures of all kinds rained upon the new converts. Sheridan, with instinctive perception of the mode of attack which suited his powers best, seized upon this with something of the same fervour as that with which, though in no way particularly interested in India, he had seized upon the story of the injured Begums and cruel English conquerors in the East. It was altogether the other side of the argument, yet the inspiration of the orator was the same. It was now the despoilers who were his clients; but their work of destruction had not been to their own profit. They were sufferers, not gainers. No rich posts nor hidden treasures were reserved by them for themselves, and the contrast between the advantages reaped by so many Englishmen arrayed against them, and the sacrifices and privations of the French patriots, was perfect. Sheridan took up the subject with all the greater

wealth and energy of indignant conviction that he himself had never reaped any substantial advantage from the occasional elevation of his own party. He had carried no spoils with him out of office; he had not made hay while the sun shone. If anybody had a right to be called a disinterested politician he had, in this sense at least. His interest in the subjects which he treated might be more a party interest than any real devotion to the cause of freedom and humanity; but his hands were clean from bribe or pecuniary inducement; and his fervour, if perhaps churned up a little by party motives, was never ungenerous. The indignant bitterness with which he and the small party who adhered to Fox regarded the desertion of so many of their supporters gave force to the reply with which he met Lord Mornington's unlucky description of the French efforts. On no other point could the comparison have been so completely in favour of the revolutionary. Sheridan takes the account of their privations triumphantly out of the hand of the narrator. Far different indeed, he cries scornfully, is the position of the rival statesmen and officials in England. He can imagine the address made to them "by our prudent Minister" in words like the following—words which burn and sting with all the fire of satire:

"Do I demand of you wealthy citizens [it is Pitt who is supposed to be the speaker] to lend your hoards to Government without interest? On the contrary, when I shall come to propose a loan, there is not a man of you to whom I shall not hold out at least a job in every part of the subscription, and a usurious profit upon every pound you devote to the necessities of your country. Do I demand of you, my fellow-placemen and brother-pensioners, that you should sacrifice any part of your stipends to the public exigency? On the contrary, am I not daily insuring your emoluments, and your numbers in proportion as the country becomes unable to provide for you?

Do I require of you, my latest and most zealous proselytes—of you who have come over to me for the special purpose of supporting the war, a war on the success of which you solemnly protest that the salvation of Britain and of civil society itself depends—do I require of you that you should make a temporary sacrifice in the cause of human nature of the greater part of your private incomes? No, gentlemen, I scorn to take advantage of the eagerness of your zeal; and to prove that I think the sincerity of your attachment to me needs no such test, I will make your interest co-operate with your principle; I will quarter many of you on the public supply, instead of calling on you to contribute to it, and while their whole thoughts are absorbed in patriotic apprehensions for their country, I will dexterously force upon others the favorite objects of the vanity or ambition of their lives."

Then the orator turns to give his own judgment of the state of affairs. "Good God, sir!" he cries, "that he should have thought it prudent to have forced this contrast upon our attention!" and he hurries on with indignant eloquence to describe the representations made of "the unprecedented peril of the country," the constitution in danger, the necessity of "maintaining the war by every possible sacrifice," and that the people should not murmur at their burdens, seeing that their all was at stake:

"The time is come when all honest and disinterested men should rally round the throne as round a standard—for what? Ye honest and disinterested men, to receive, for your own private emolument, a portion of those very taxes which they themselves wring from the people on the pretence of saving them from the poverty and distress which you say the enemy would inflict, but which you take care no enemy shall be able to aggravate. Oh, shame! shame! is this a time for selfish intrigues, and the little dirty traffic for lucre and emolument? Does it suit the honour of a gentleman to ask at such a moment? Does it become the honesty of a minister to grant? Is it intended to confirm the pernicious doctrine, so industriously propagated by many, that all public men are impostors, and that every

politician has his price? Or even where there is no principle in bosom, why does not prudence hint to the mercenary and the to abstain a while at least, and wait the fitting of the times? provident impatience! Nay, even from those who seem to hav direct object of office or profit, what is the language which the a speak? The throne is in danger! we will support the throne; let us share the smiles of royalty. The order of nobility is in dan 'I will fight for nobility,' says the viscount, 'but my zeal woul much greater if I were made an earl.' 'Rouse all the marquis wi me,' exclaims the earl, 'and the peerage never turned forth a r undaunted champion in its cause than I shall prove.' 'Stain green ribbon blue,' cries out the illustrious knight, 'and the f tain of honour will have a fast and faithful servant.'"

This scathing blast of satire must, one would th have overwhelmed the Whig deserters, the new placer and sinecurists, though it could not touch the im sioned soul of such a prophet as Burke, whose denun tions and anticipations had been so terribly verified. reader already acquainted with the life of Burke will member how, early in the controversy, before France stained her first triumphs, Sheridan lost, on account his continued faith in the Revolution, the friendship his great countryman, whose fiery temper was unable brook so great a divergence of opinion, and who cut sternly off, as he afterwards did a more congenial devoted friend, Fox, by whom the breach was ackn edged with tears in a scene as moving as ever was acted in the House of Commons. Sheridan did not it so deeply, the link between them being lighter, and position of involuntary rivalship almost inevitable. A though it cannot be believed that his convictions on subject were half so profound, or his judgment so tr worthy, his was the more difficult side of opinion, his fidelity to the cause, which, politically and, we r

even say, conventionally, was that of freedom, was unwavering. The speech from which we have quoted could not, from its nature, be so carefully premeditated and prepared as Sheridan's great efforts had heretofore been; but it had the advantage of being corrected for the press, and has consequently reached us in a fuller and more complete form than any other of Sheridan's speeches. Professor Smyth gives a graphic account of his sudden appearance at Wanstead along with the editor of the paper in which it had been reported, and of the laborious diligence with which he devoted himself to its revision, during several days of unbroken work. But we should scarcely have known our Sheridan had not this spasmodic effort been balanced by an instance of characteristic indolence and carelessness. Lord Mornington in his speech had made much reference to a French pamphlet by Brissot, a translation of which had been republished in London, with a preface by Burke, and largely circulated. Smyth remarked that Sheridan accepted Lord M.'s view of this pamphlet, and his quotations from it. "How could I do otherwise?" he said. "I never read a word of it." Perhaps it was not necessary. The careful combination of facts and details was not in Sheridan's way; but in his hap-hazard daring a certain instinct guided him, and he seized unerringly the thing he could do, the point of the position, picturesque and personal, which his faculty could best assail.

A far less satisfactory chapter in his life was that already referred to, which linked Sheridan's fortunes with those of the Prince Regent, and made him, for a long time, almost the representative in Parliament of that royal personage. When the first illness of the King, in 1789, made it likely that power must come one way or other

into the hands of the heir-apparent, there was much excitement, as was natural, among the party with which the name of the Prince of Wales was connected, and who, as appeared, had everything to hope from his accession, actual or virtual. It is scarcely necessary to our purpose to trace the stormy party discussions on the subject of the Regency, between the extreme claim put forth by Fox of the right of the Prince to be immediately invested with all the powers of royalty, as his father's natural deputy and representative, and the equally extreme counter-statement of Pitt, dictated by alarm, as the other was by hope, that "the "Prince of Wales had no more right to exercise the powers of government than any other person in the realm." Sheridan's share in the debate was chiefly signalised by his threat, as injudicious as the original assertion of his leader, that "the Prince might be provoked to make the claim which the other party opposed so strenuously;" "but his most important agency," says Moore, "lay in the less public business connected with" the question. He was in high favour at Carlton House, and the chosen adviser of the Prince; and although Moore's researches enabled him to prove that the most important document in the whole episode—the Prince's letter to Pitt—was the production, not of Sheridan, but of the master-spirit, Burke, Sheridan's pen was employed in various papers of importance; and though the post allotted to him in the shortlived new ministry was no more than that of Treasurer of the Navy, a position not at all adequate to his apparent importance, he was in reality a very active agent behind the scenes. The King's speedy recovery, however, at this moment was fatal to Sheridan's fortunes, and all that came of this momentary gleam of advancement to his family was that Charles Sheridan, in Ireland, whose post had been the only gain

of his brother's former taste of power, lost it in consequence of the new re-revolution of affairs, though he carried with him a pension of £1200 a year—probably a very good substitute. He was the only one profited in pocket by Sheridan's political elevation and fame. Once more, in 1806, after the death of Pitt, Sheridan followed Fox into office in the same unimportant post of Treasurer to the Navy. But Fortune was not on his side, and Fox's death in a few months withdrew him for ever from all the chances of power.

It seems inconceivable, though true, that the two great orators of the period, the men whose figures stand prominent in every discussion, and one of whom at least had so large and profound an influence on his time, should, when their party rose to the head of affairs, have been so unceremoniously disposed of. Sheridan's insignificant post might be accounted for by his known incapacity for continued exertion; but to read the name of Burke as Paymaster of the Forces fills the reader with amazement. They were both self-made, without family or connections to found a claim upon, but the eminence, especially of the latter, was incontestable. Both were of the highest importance to their party, and Sheridan was in the enjoyment of that favour of the Prince which told for so much in those days. And yet this was the best that their claims could secure. It is a somewhat humiliating proof of how little great mental gifts, reaching the height of genius in one case, can do for their possessor. Both Burke and Sheridan are favourite instances of the reverse opinion. It is a commonplace to quote them as examples of the manner in which a man of genius may raise himself to the highest elevation. And yet, after they had dazzled England for years, one of them the highest originating

soul, the profoundest thinker of his class, the other an unrivalled instrument at least in the hand of a great party leader, this was all they could attain to—Edmund Burke, Paymaster of the Forces; Brinsley Sheridan, Treasurer of the Navy. It is a curious commentary upon the unbounded applause and reputation which these two men enjoyed in their day, and the place they have taken permanently in the history of their generation.

Sheridan's connection with the Prince lasted for many years. He appears to have been not only one of his favourite companions, but for some time at least his most confidential adviser. When the Prince on his marriage put forth a second demand for the payment of his debts, after the distinct promise made on the first occasion that no such claim should be made again, it was Sheridan who was the apologist, if apology his explanation can be called. He informed the House that he had advised the Prince to make no such pledge, but that it was inserted without the knowledge of either, and at a moment when it was impossible to withdraw from it. He added that he himself had drawn up a scheme of retrenchment which would have made such an application unnecessary, that he had put a stop to a loan proposed to be raised for the Prince in France, as unconstitutional, and that he had systematically counselled an abstinence from all meddling in great political questions. Moore characterises this explanation as marked by "a communicativeness that seemed hardly prudent," and it is difficult to suppose that Sheridan's royal patron could have liked it; but he did not disown it in any way, and retained the speaker in his closest confidence for many years, during which Sheridan's time and pen and ready eloquence were always at his master's service. There is a strange mixture throughout his history

of serviceableness and capacity for work, with an almost incredible carelessness and indolence, of which his behaviour at this period affords a curious example. He would seem to have spared no trouble in the Prince's service, to have been ready at his call at all times and seasons, conducting the most important negotiations for him, and acting as the means of communication between him and the leaders of his party. Perhaps pride and a gratified sense of knowing the mind of the heir-apparent better than any one else, may have supplied the place of true energy and diligence for the moment; and certainly he was zealous and busy in his patron's affairs, disorderly and indifferent as he was in his own. And though his power and influence were daily decreasing in Parliament, his attendance becoming more and more irregular, and his interest in public business capricious and fitful, yet there were still occasions on which Sheridan came to the front with an energy and spirit worthy of his best days. One of these was at the time of the great mutiny at the Nore, when the ministry was embarrassed on all hands, the Opposition violently factious, and every appearance alarming. Sheridan threw himself into the midst of the excitement with a bold and generous support of the Government, which strengthened their hands in the emergency and did much to restore tranquillity and confidence. "The patriotic promptitude of his interference," says Moore, "was even more striking than it appears in the record of his parliamentary labours." By this time Fox had withdrawn from the House, and no other of the Whig leaders showed anything of Sheridan's energy and public spirit. At a still later period, in the course of a discussion on the army estimates, he was complimented by Canning as "a man who had often come forward in times of public em-

barrassment as the champion of the country's rights and interests, and had rallied the hearts and spirits of the nation." The warmest admirer of Sheridan might be content to let such words as these stand as the conclusion of his parliamentary career.

Thus his life was checkered with bursts of recovery, with rapid and unexpected manifestations of power. Now and then he would rise to the height of a crisis, and by moments display a faculty prompt and eager and practical. Sometimes, on a special occasion, he would work hard, "till the motes were in his eyes." There must have been in him some germ of financial genius which enabled him without any capital to acquire great property, and conduct what was in reality a large commercial speculation in his theatre with success for many years. All these qualities are strangely at variance with the background of heedlessness, indolence, and reckless self indulgence which take both credit and purpose out of his life. He is like two men, one of them painfully building up what the other every day delights to pull down. His existence from the time of his wife's death seems, when we look back upon it, like a headlong rush to destruction; and yet even in the last chapter of his career there were times when he would turn and stand and present a manful front to fate. Though there is no appearance in anything he says or does of very high political principles, yet he held steadfastly by the cause of reform, and for the freedom of the subject, and against all encroachments of power, as long as he lived. He was on the side of Ireland in the troubles then as always existing, though of a changed complexion from those we are familiar with now. He would not allow himself to be persuaded out of his faith in the new principle of freedom in France, either by the

excesses which disgraced it, or by the potent arguments of his friend and countryman. And he was disinterested and faithful in his party relations, giving up office almost unnecessarily when he considered that his political allegiance required it, and holding fast to his leader even when there was estrangement between them. All these particulars should be remembered to Sheridan's credit. He got nothing for his political services, at a time when sinecures were common, and, with one exception, kept his political honour stainless, and never departed from his standard.

He served the Prince in the same spirit of disinterestedness—a disinterestedness so excessive that it looks like recklessness and ostentatious indifference to ordinary motives. That gratification in the confidence of royalty, which in all ages has moved men to sacrifices and labours not undertaken willingly in any other cause, seems a poor sort of inspiration when Royal George was the object of it; but in this case it was like master like man, and the boon companion whose wit enlivened the royal orgies was not likely perhaps to judge his Prince by any high ideal. He had never received from his royal friend "so much as the present of a horse or a picture," until in the year 1804 the appointment of Receiver of the Duchy of Cornwall was conferred upon him, an appointment which he announces to the then Minister, Mr. Addington, with lively satisfaction and gratitude:

"It has been my pride and pleasure," he says, "to have exerted my humble efforts to serve the Prince without ever accepting the slightest obligation from him; but in the present case and under the present circumstances I think it would have been really false pride and apparently mischievous affectation to have declined this mark of his Royal Highness's confidence and favour."

It was no great return for so many services; and even this was not at first a satisfactory gift, since it had been previously bestowed (hypothetically) on some one else, and a long correspondence and many representations and explanations seem to have been exchanged before Sheridan was secure in his post—the only profit he carried with him out of his prolonged and brilliant political life.

The one instance, which has been referred to, in which his political loyalty was defective occurred very near the end of his career. Fox was dead, to whom, though some misunderstanding had clouded their later intercourse, he had always been faithful, and other leaders had succeeded in the conduct of the party, leaders with whom Sheridan had less friendship and sympathy, and who had thwarted him in his wish to succeed Fox as the representative of Westminster, an honour on which he had set his heart. It was in favour of a young nobleman of no account in the political world that the man who had so long been an ornament to the party, and had in his day done it such manful service, was put aside; and Sheridan would have been more than mortal had he not felt it deeply. The opportunity of avenging himself occurred before long. When the Prince, his patron, finally came to the position of Regent, under many restrictions, and with an almost harsh insistence upon the fact that he held the office not by right, but by the will of Parliament, Sheridan had one moment of triumph—a triumph almost whimsical in its completeness. In the ordinary course of affairs it became the duty of the Lords Grey and Granville, the recognised leaders of the Whig party, which up to this time had been the party specially attached to the Prince, to prepare his reply to the address presented to him by the Houses of

Parliament; but the document, when submitted to him, was not to the royal taste. Sheridan, in the meanwhile, who knew all the thoughts of his patron and how to please him, had prepared privately, almost accidentally, according to his own account, a draft of another reply, which the Prince adopted instead, to the astonishment and indignant dismay of the official leaders, who could scarcely believe in the possibility of such an interference. Moore enters into a lengthened explanation of Sheridan's motives and conduct, supported by his own letters and statements, of which there are so many that it is very apparent he was himself conscious of much necessity for explanation. The great Whig Lords, who thus found themselves superseded, made an indignant remonstrance; but the mischief was done. In the point of view of party allegiance the proceeding was indefensible; and yet we cannot but think the reader will feel a certain sympathy with Sheridan in this sudden turning of the tables upon the men who had slighted him and ignored his claims. They were new men, less experienced than himself, and the dangerous gratification of showing that, in spite of all they might do, he had still the power to forestall and defeat them, must have been a very strong temptation. But such gratifications are of a fatal kind. Sheridan himself, even at the moment of enjoying it, must have been aware of the perilous step he was taking. And it is another proof of the curious mixture of capacity for business and labour which existed in him along with the most reckless indolence and forgetfulness, that the literature of this incident is so abundant; and that, what with drafts prepared for the Prince's consideration, and letters and documents of state corrected for his adoption, and all the explanatory addresses on his own account which Sheridan thought necessary, he was as

fully employed at this crisis as if he had been a Secretary of State.

This or anything like it he was not, however, fated to be. A humbler appointment, that of Chief Secretary, under the Lord-lieutenant of Ireland, had been designed for him had the Whig party, as they anticipated, come into office; although, after the mortification to which Sheridan had subjected his noble chiefs, even such an expedient of getting honourably rid of him might have been more than their magnanimity was equal to. But these expectations faded as soon as the Regent was firmly established in his place. The Prince, as is well known, pursued the course common to heirs on their accession, and flung over the party of Opposition to which he had previously attached himself. The Whigs were left in the lurch, and their political opponents continued in power. That Sheridan had a considerable share in bringing this about seems evident; but in punishing them he punished also himself. If he could not serve under them, it was evidently impossible that under the other party he could with any regard to his own honour serve. There is an account in the anonymous biography to which reference has been made of an attempt on the part of the Prince to induce Sheridan to follow himself in his change of politics; but this has an apocryphal aspect, as the report of a private conversation between two persons, neither very likely to repeat it, always has. It is added that, after Sheridan's refusal, he saw no more of his royal patron. Anyhow it would seem that the intercourse between them failed after this point. The brilliant instrument had done its service, and was no longer wanted. To please his Prince, and perhaps to avenge himself, he had broken his allegiance to his party, and henceforward neither they whom he had thus deserted, nor he for whom he had

deserted them, had any place or occasion for him. He continued to appear fitfully in his place in Parliament for some time after, and one of his latest speeches gives expression to his views on the subject of Catholic Emancipation. Sheridan's nationality could be little more than nominal, yet his interest in Irish affairs had always been great, and he had invariably supported the cause of that troubled country in all emergencies. In this speech, which was one of the last expressions of his opinions on an Irish subject, he maintains that the good treatment of the Catholics was "essential to the safety of this empire":

"I will never give my vote to any Administration that opposes the question of Catholic Emancipation. I will not consent to receive a furlough upon that particular question, even though a ministry were carrying every other I wished. In fine, I think the situation of Ireland a permanent consideration. If they were to be the last words I should ever utter in this House I should say, 'Be just to Ireland as you value your own honour; be just to Ireland as you value your own peace.'"

In this point at least he showed true discernment, and was no false prophet.

The last stroke of evil fortune had, however, fallen upon Sheridan several years before the conclusion of his parliamentary life, putting what was in reality the finishing touch to his many and long-continued embarrassments. One evening in the early spring of the year 1809 a sudden blaze illuminated the House of Commons in the midst of a debate, lighting up the assembly with so fiery and wild a light that the discussion was interrupted in alarm. Sheridan was present in his place, and when the intimation was made that the blaze came from Drury Lane, and that his new theatre, so lately opened, and still scarcely completed, was the fuel which fed this fire, it must have

been a pale countenance indeed upon which that fiery illumination shone; but he had never failed in courage, and this time the thrill of desperation must have moved the man whose ruin was thus accomplished. When some scared member, perhaps with a tender thought for the orator who had once in that place stood so high, proposed the adjournment of the House, Sheridan, with the proud calm which such a highly-strained nature is capable of in great emergencies, was the first to oppose the impulse. "Whatever might be the extent of the calamity," he said, "he hoped it would not interfere with the public business of the country." He left his brother members to debate the war in Spain, while he went forth to witness a catastrophe which made the further conduct of any struggle in his own person an impossibility. Some time later he was found seated in one of the coffee-houses in Covent Garden, "swallowing port by the tumblerful," as one witness says. One of the actors, who had been looking on at the scene of destruction, made an indignant and astonished outcry at sight of him, when Sheridan, looking up, with the wild gaiety of despair and that melancholy humour which so often lights up a brave man's ruin, replied, "Surely a man may be allowed to take a glass of wine by his own fireside." The blaze which shone upon these melancholy potations consumed everything he had to look to in the world. He was still full of power to enjoy, a man not old in years, and of the temperament which never grows old; but he must have seen everything that made life possible flying from him in those thick-coiling wreaths of smoke. There was still his parliamentary life and his Prince's favour to fall back upon, but probably in that dark hour his better judgment showed him that everything was lost.

After the moment of disaster, however, Sheridan's buoyant nature and that keen speculative faculty which would seem to have been so strong in him, awoke with all the fervour of the rebound from despair, as he began to see a new hope. In a letter addressed to Mr. Whitbread, written soon after the fire, and with the high compliment that he considered Whitbread "the man living in my estimation the most disposed and the most competent to bestow a portion of your time and ability to assist the call of friendship," he thus appeals to his kindness:

"You said some time since, in my house, but in a careless conversation only, that you would be a member of a committee for rebuilding Drury Lane Theatre, if it would serve me; and indeed you very kindly suggested yourself that there were more persons to assist that object than I was aware of. I most thankfully accept the offer of your interference, and am convinced of the benefits your friendly exertions are competent to produce. I have worked the whole subject in my own mind, and see a clear way to retrieve a great property, at least to my son and his family, if my plan meets the support I hope it will appear to merit.

"Writing this to you in the sincerity of private friendship and the reliance I place on my opinion of your character, I need not ask of you, though eager and active in politics as you are, not to be severe in criticising my palpable neglect of all parliamentary duty. It would not be easy to explain to you, or even to make you comprehend, or any one in prosperous and affluent plight, the private difficulties I have to struggle with. My mind and the resolute independence belonging to it has not been in the least subdued by the late calamity; but the consequences arising from it have more engaged and embarrassed me than perhaps I have been willing to allow. It has been a principle of my life, persevered in through great difficulties, never to borrow money of a private friend; and this resolution I would starve rather than violate. When I ask you to take part in this settlement of my shattered affairs I ask you only to do so after a previous investigation of every part of the past circumstances which relate to the truth. I wish you to accept, in conjunction with those

who wish to serve me, and to whom I think you would not object. I may be again seized with an illness as alarming as that I lately experienced. Assist me in relieving my mind from the greatest affliction that such a situation can again produce—the fear of others suffering by my death."

Sheridan's proposal was, that the theatre should be rebuilt by subscription by a committee under the chairmanship of Whitbread, he himself and his son receiving from them an equivalent in money for their share of the property under the patent. This was done accordingly. Sheridan's share amounted to £24,000, while his son got the half of that sum. But the money which was to take the place of the income which Sheridan had so long drawn from the theatre was, it is needless to say, utterly inadequate, and was ingulfed almost immediately by payments. Indeed, the force of circumstances and his necessities compelled him to use it, as he might have used a sum independent of his regular income which had fallen into his hand. Whitbread was not to be dealt with now as had been the world in general in Sheridan's brighter days. "He was, perhaps," says Moore, "the only person whom Sheridan had ever found proof against his powers of persuasion;" and as in the long labyrinth of engagements which Sheridan no more expected to be held closely to than he would himself have held to a bargain, he had undertaken to wait for his money until the theatre was rebuilt, there were endless controversies and struggles over every demand he made: and they were many. Sheridan had pledged himself also to non-interference, to "have no concern or connection of any kind whatever with the new undertaking," with as little idea of being held to the pledge; and when his criticisms upon the plans, and attempts to alter them, were repulsed, and the promises he

had made recalled to his memory, his indignation knew no bounds. "There cannot exist in England," he cries, "an individual so presumptuous or so void of common-sense as not sincerely to solicit the aid of my practical experience on this occasion, even were I not in justice to the subscribers bound to offer it." In short, it is evident that he never had faced the position at all, but expected to remain to some extent at the head of affairs as of old, and with an inexhaustible treasury to draw upon, although he had formally renounced all claim upon either. When he wrote indignantly to Whitbread as to an advance of £2000 which had been refused to him, and of which he declared that "this and this alone lost me my election" (to Stafford, whither he had returned after his failure at Westminster), Whitbread replied in a letter which paints the condition of the unfortunate man beset by creditors with the most pitiful distinctness:

"You will recollect the £5000 pledged to Peter Moore to answer demands; the certificates given to Giblet, Ker, Iremonger, Cross, and Hirdle, five each at your request; the engagements given to Ettes and myself, and the arrears to the Linley family. All this taken into consideration will leave a large balance still payable to you. Still there are upon that balance the claims upon you of Shaw, Taylor, and Grubb, for all of which you have offered to leave the whole of your compensation in my hand to abide the issue of arbitration."

Poor Sheridan! he had meant to eat his cake yet have it, as is so common. In his wonderful life of shifts and chances he had managed to do so again and again. But the moment had come when it was no more practicable, and neither persuasion nor threats nor indignation could move the stern man of business to whom he had so lately appealed as the man of all others most likely to help and succour. He was so deeply wounded by the management

of the new building and all its arrangements that he would not permit his wife to accept the box which had been offered for her use by the committee, and it was a long time before he could be persuaded so much as to enter the theatre with which his whole life had been connected. It was for the opening of this new Drury Lane that the competition of Opening Addresses was called for by the new proprietors, which has been made memorable by the "Rejected Addresses" of Horace and James Smith, one of the few burlesques which have taken a prominent place in literature. It was a tradesmanlike idea to propose such a competition to English poets, and the reader will willingly excuse the touch of bitterness in Sheridan's witty description of the Ode contributed by Whitbread himself, which, like most of the addresses, "turned chiefly on allusions to the phœnix." "But Whitbread made more of the bird than any of them," Sheridan said; "he entered into particulars and described its wings, beak, tail, etc.; in short, it was a poulterer's description."

It was while he was involved in these painful controversies and struggles that Sheridan lost his seat in Parliament. This was the finishing blow. His person, so long as he was a member of Parliament, was at least safe. He could not be arrested for debt; everything else that could be done had been attempted, but this last indignity was impossible. Now, however, that safeguard was removed; and for this among other reasons his exclusion from Parliament was to Sheridan the end of all things. His *prestige* was gone, his power over. It would seem to be certain that the Prince of Wales offered to bring him in for a Government borough; but Sheridan had not fallen so low as that. Once out of Parliament, however, the old lion was important to nobody. He could neither help to

pass a measure nor bring his eloquence to the task of smothering one. He was powerless henceforward in state intrigues, neither good to veil a prince's designs nor to aid a party movement. And, besides, he was a poor, broken-down, dissipated old man, a character meriting no respect, and for whom pity itself took a disdainful tone. He had not been less self-indulgent when the world vied in admiration and applause of him; but all his triumphs had now passed away, and what had been but the gay excess of an exuberant life became the disgraceful habit of a broken man. His debts, which had been evaded and put out of sight so often, sprang up around him, no more to be eluded. Once he was actually arrested and imprisoned in a sponging-house for two or three days, a misery and shame which fairly overcame the fortitude of the worn-out and fallen spirit. "On his return home," Moore tells us (some arrangements having been made by Whitbread for his release), "all his fortitude forsook him, and he burst into a long and passionate fit of weeping at the profanation, as he termed it, which his person had suffered." Leigh Hunt, in his flashy and frothy article, has some severe remarks upon this exhibition of feeling, but few people will wonder at it. Sheridan had been proud in his way; he had carried his head high. His own great gifts had won him a position almost unparalleled; he had been justified over and over again in the fond faith that by some happy chance, some half miraculous effort, his fortunes might still be righted and all go well. Alas! all this was over, hope and possibility were alike gone. Like a man running a desperate race, half stupefied in the rush of haste and weariness, of trembling limbs and panting bosom, whose final stumble overwhelms him with the passion of weakness, here was the point in which every horror

culminated and every power broke down. The sanguine, foolish bravery of the man was such even then that next moment he was calculating upon the possibility of re-election for Westminster, a seat which was one of the prizes sought by favourites of fortune; and, writing to his solicitor after his personal possessions, pictures, books, and nick-nacks, had been sacrificed, comforted him with a cheerful "However, we shall come through!"

Poor Sheridan! the heart bleeds to contemplate him in all his desperate shifts, now maudlin in tears, now wild in foolish gaiety and hope. Prince and party alike left him to sink or swim as he pleased. When it was told him that young Byron, the new hero of society, had praised him as the writer of the best comedy, the best opera, the best oration of his time, the veteran burst into tears. A compliment now was an unwonted delight to one who had received the plaudits of two generations, and who had moved men's minds as few besides had been able to do. A little band of friends, very few and of no great renown, were steadfast to him—Peter Moore, M.P. for Coventry, Samuel Rogers, his physician, Dr. Bain, he who had attended the death-bed of Mrs. Sheridan—stood by him faithfully through all; but he passed through the difficulties of his later years, and descended into the valley of the shadow of death, deserted, but for them, by all who had professed friendship for him. Lord Holland, indeed, is said to have visited him once, and the Duke of Kent wrote him a polite, regretful letter when he announced his inability to attend a meeting; but not even an inquiry came from Carlton House, and all the statesmen whom he had offended, and those to whom he had long been so faithful a colleague, deserted him unanimously. When the troubles of his later life culminated in illness a more forlorn

being did not exist. He had worn out his excellent constitution with hard living and continual excesses. Oceans of potent port had exhausted his digestive organs; he had no longer either the elasticity of youth to endure, or its hopeful prospects to bear him up. He was, indeed, still cheerful, sanguine, full of plans and new ideas for "getting through," till the very end. But this had long been a matter beyond hope. His last days were harassed by all the miseries of poverty—nay, by what is worse, the miseries of indebtedness. That he should starve was impossible; but he had worse to bear, he had to encounter the importunities of creditors whom he could not pay, some at least of whom were perhaps as much to be pitied as himself. He was not safe night nor day from the assaults of the exasperated or despairing. "Writs and executions came in rapid succession, and bailiffs at length gained possession of his house." That house was denuded of everything that would sell in it, and the chamber in which he lay dying was threatened, and in one instance at least invaded by sheriff's officers, who would have carried him off wrapped in his blankets, had not Dr. Bain interfered, and warned them that his life was at stake. One evening Rogers, on returning home late at night, found a despairing appeal on his table. "I find things settled so that £150 will remove all difficulty; I am absolutely undone and broken-hearted. I shall negotiate for the plays successfully in the course of a week, when all shall be returned. They are going to put the carpets out of the window and break into Mrs. S.'s room and *take* me. For God's sake let me see you." Moore was with Rogers, and vouches for this piteous demand on his own authority. The two poets turned out after midnight to Sheridan's house, and spoke over the area rails to a servant, who as-

sured them that all was safe for the night. Miserable crisis so often repeated! In the morning the money was sent by the hands of Moore, who gives this last description of the unfortunate and forsaken:

"I found Mr. Sheridan good-natured and cordial, and though he was then within a few weeks of his death his voice had not lost its fulness or strength, nor was that lustre for which his eyes were so remarkable diminished. He showed, too, his usual sanguineness of disposition in speaking of the price he expected for his dramatic works, and of the certainty he felt of being able to manage all his affairs, if his complaint would but suffer him to leave his bed."

Moore adds, with natural indignation, that during the whole of his lingering illness "it does not appear that any one of his noble or royal friends ever called at his door, or even sent to inquire after him."

At last the end came. When the Bishop of London, sent for by Mrs. Sheridan, came to visit the dying man, she told Mr. Smyth that such a paleness of awe came over his face as she could never forget. He had never taken time or thought for the unseen, and the appearance of the priest, like a forerunner of death itself, stunned and startled the man whose life had been occupied with far other subjects. But he was not one to avoid any of the decent and becoming preliminaries that custom had made indispensable—nay, there was so much susceptibility to emotion in him, that no doubt he was able to find comfort in the observances of a death-bed, even though his mind was little accustomed to religious thought or observance. Nothing more squalid, more miserable and painful, than the state of his house outside of the sick-chamber could be. When Smyth arrived in loyal friendship and pity to see his old patron he found the desecrated place in possession of bailiffs, and everything in the chill disorder which such

a miserable invasion produces. Poor Mrs. Sheridan, meeting him with a kind of sprightly despair, suggested that he must want food after his journey. "I dare say you think there is nothing to be had in such a house; but we are not so bad as that," she cried. The shocked and sympathetic visitor had little heart to eat, as may be supposed, and he was profoundly moved by the description of that pale awe with which Sheridan had resigned himself to the immediate prospect of death.

In the mean time, some one outside—possibly Moore himself, though he does not say so—had written a letter to the *Morning Post*, calling attention to the utter desertion in which Sheridan had been left:

"Oh, delay not!" said the writer, without naming the person to whom he alluded [we quote from Moore]—"delay not to draw aside the curtain within which that proud spirit hides its sufferings." He then adds, with a striking anticipation of what afterwards happened: "Prefer ministering in the chamber of sickness to mustering at

'The splendid sorrows that adorn the hearse.'

"I say *life* and *succour* against Westminster Abbey and a funeral. This article" [Moore continues] "produced a strong and general impression, and was reprinted in the same paper the following day."

So unusual a fact proves the interest which Sheridan still called forth in the public mind. It had so much effect that various high-sounding names were heard again at Sheridan's door among the hangers-on of the law and the disturbed and terrified servants, who did not know when an attempt might be made upon their master's person, dying or dead. The card even of the Duke of York, the inquiries of peers or wealthy commoners, to whom it would have been so easy to conjure all Sheridan's assailants away, could no longer help or harm him. After a

period of unconsciousness, on a Sunday in July, in the height of summer and sunshine, this great minstrant to the amusement of the world, this orator who had swayed them with his breath, died, like the leader of a besieged castle, safe only in the inmost citadel, beset with eager foes all ready to rush in, and faithful servants glad that he should hasten out of the world and escape the last indignity. Among the many lessons of the vicissitudes of life with which we are all familiar there never was any more effective. It is like one of the strained effects of the stage, to which Sheridan's early reputation belonged; and like a curious repetition of his early and sudden fame, or rather like the scornful commentary upon it of some devilish cynic permitted for the moment to scoff at mankind, is the apotheosis of his conclusion. The man who was hustled into his coffin to escape the touch which he had dreaded so much in life, that profanation of his person which had moved him to tears and hastily carried forth in the night to the shelter of his friend's house, that he might not be arrested, dead was no sooner covered with the funeral pall than dukes and princes volunteered to bear it. Two royal highnesses, half the dukes and earls and barons of the peerage, followed him in the guise of mourning to Westminster Abbey, where among the greatest names of English literature, in the most solemn and splendid shrine of national honour, this spendthrift of genius, this prodigal of fame, was laid for the first time in all his uneasy being to secure and certain rest. He had been born in obscurity — he died in misery. Out of the humblest, unprovided, unendowed poverty he had blazed into reputation, into all the results of great wealth, if never to its substance; more wonderful still, he had risen to public importance and splendour, and his name can

never be obliterated from the page of history; but had fallen again, down, down into desertion, misery, and the deepest degradation of a poverty for which there was neither hope nor help: till death wiped out all possibilities of further trouble or embarrassment, and Sheridan became once more in his coffin the great man whom his party delighted to honour—a national name and credit, one of those whose glory illustrates our annals. It may be permitted now to doubt whether these last mournful honours were not more than his real services to England deserved; but at the moment it was, no doubt, a fine thing that the poor, hopeless "Sherry" whom everybody admired and despised, whom no one but a few faithful friends would risk the trouble of helping, who had sunk away out of all knowledge into endless debts, and duns, and drink, should rise in an instant as soon as death had stilled his troubles into the Right Honourable, brilliant, and splendid Sheridan, whose enchanter's wand the stubborn Pitt had bowed under, and the noble Burke acknowledged with enthusiasm. It was a fine thing; but the finest thing was that death, which in England makes all glory possible, and which restores to the troublesome bankrupt, the unfortunate prodigal, and all stray sons of fame, at one stroke, their friends, their reputation, and the abundant tribute which it might have been dangerous to afford them living, but with which it is both safe and prudent to glorify their tomb. So Scotland did to Burns, letting him suffer all the tortures of a proud spirit for want of a ten-pound note, but sending a useless train of local gentry to attend him to his grave—and so the Whig peers and potentates did to Sheridan, who had been their equal and companion. Such things repeat themselves in the history of the generations, but no one takes the lesson, though every one

comments upon it. Men of letters have ceased, to a great extent, to be improvident and spendthrifts, and seldom require to be picked out of ruin by their friends and disciples in these days; but who can doubt that, were there another Sheridan amongst us, his fate would be the same?

It has to be added, however, that had the great people who did nothing for him stepped in to relieve Sheridan and prolong his life, nothing is more probable than that the process would have had to be repeated from time to time, as was done for Lamartine in France, since men do not learn economy, or the wise use of their means, after a long life of reckless profusion. But he had gained nothing by his political career, in which most of the politicians of the time gained so much, and it is said that his liabilities came to no more than £4000, for which sum surely it was not meet to suffer such a man to be hunted to his grave by clamorous creditors, however just their claim or natural their exasperation. Somebody said, in natural enthusiasm, when it was announced that the author of *Waverley* was overwhelmed with debts, "Let every one to whom he has given pleasure give him sixpence, and he will be the richest man in Europe." Yes! but the saying remained a very pretty piece of good-nature and pleasing appreciation, no one attempting to carry its suggestion out. Sir Walter would have accepted no public charity, but a public offering on such a grand scale, had it ever been offered, would not have shamed the proudest. These things are easy to say; the doing only fails in our practical British race with a curious consistency. It is well that every man should learn that his own exertions are his only trust; but when that is said it is not all that there should be to say.

"Where were they, these royal and noble persons" [Moore cries, ith natural fervour of indignation], "who now crowded to 'partake ie yoke' of Sheridan's glory; where were they all while any life re- ained in him? Where were they all but a few weeks before, when ieir interposition might have saved his heart from breaking? or hen the zeal now wasted on the grave might have soothed and omforted the death-bed? This is a subject on which it is difficult speak with patience. If the man was unworthy of the commonest ffices of humanity while he lived, why all this parade of regret and omage over his tomb?"

And he adds the following verses which "appeared," he ays, "at the time, and, however intemperate in their satire nd careless in their style, came evidently warm from the reast of the writer" (himself):

"Oh! it sickens the heart to see bosoms so hollow,
And friendships so false in the great and high-born;
To think what a long line of titles may follow
The relics of him who died friendless and lorn.

"How proud they can press to the funeral array
Of him whom they shunned in his sickness and sorrow;
How bailiffs may seize his last blanket to-day,
Whose pall shall be held up by nobles to-morrow."

When all these details which move the heart out of the omposedness of criticism are put aside we scarcely feel urselves in a position to echo the lavish praises which ave been showered upon Sheridan. He was no con- cientious workman labouring his field, but an abrupt nd hasty wayfarer snatching at the golden apples where ney grew, and content with one violent abundance of arvesting. He had no sooner gained the highest suc- esses which the theatre could give than he abandoned hat scene of triumph for a greater one; and when—on hat more glorious stage—he had produced one of the

most striking sensations known to English political life, his interest in that also waned, and a broken, occasional effort now and then only served to show what he might have accomplished had it been continuous. If he had been free of the vices that pulled him to earth, and possessed of the industry and persistency which were not in his nature, he would, with scarcely any doubt, have left both fortune and rank to his descendants. As it was in everything he did, he but scratched the soil. Those who believe that the conditions under which a man does his work are those which are best adapted to his genius will comfort themselves that there was nothing beyond this fertile surface, soon exhausted and capable of but one overflowing crop and no more, and there is a completeness and want of suggestion in his literary work which favours this idea. But the other features of his life are equally paradoxical and extraordinary; the remarkable financial operations which must have formed the foundation of his career were combined with the utmost practical deficiency in the same sphere; and his faculty for business, for negotiation, explanation, copious letter-writing, and statement of opinion, contrast as strangely with the absolute indolence which seems to have distinguished his life. He could conjure great sums of money out of nothing, out of vacancy, to buy his theatre, and set himself up in a lavish and prodigal life, but he could not keep his private affairs out of the most hopeless confusion. He could arrange the terms of a Regency and outwit a party, but he could not read, much less reply to, the letters addressed to him, or keep any sort of order in the private business on his hands. Finally, and perhaps most extraordinary of all, he could give in *The Critic* the deathblow to false tragedy, then write the bombast of Rolla, and prepare *Pizarro*

for the stage. Through all these contradictions Sheridan blazed and exploded from side to side in a reckless yet rigid course, like a gigantic and splendid piece of fire-work, his follies repeating themselves, his inability to follow up success, and careless abandonment of one way after another that might have led to a better and happier fortune. He had a fit of writing, a fit of oratory, but no impulse to keep him in either path long enough to make anything more than the dazzling but evanescent triumph of a day. His harvest was like a Southern harvest, over early, while it was yet but May; but he sowed no seed for a second ingathering, nor was there any growth or richness left in the soon exhausted soil.

Sheridan's death took place July 7, 1816, when he was nearly sixty-five, after more than thirty years of active political life. His boyish reputation, won before this began, has outlasted all that high place, extraordinary opportunity, and not less extraordinary success, could do for his name and fame.

THE END.